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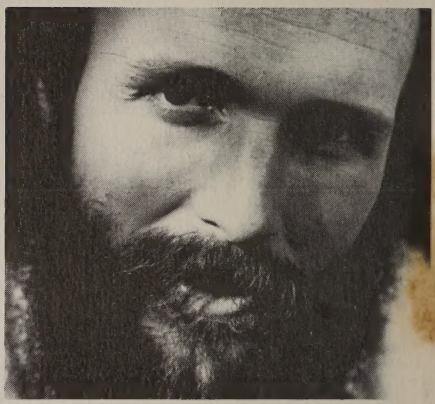
THE UNCHURCHED

Sandy Brainard / Page 8



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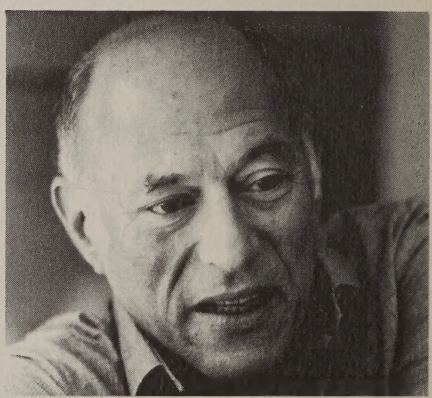

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THE UNCHURCHED

THIS fellowship of ours has often attracted Americans desirous of intensifying their spiritual lives by reaching out beyond the traditional tools supplied by the churches, synagogues, or temples of which they were members. It has also interested those dissatisfied for one reason or another with established religion. It is this segment — forty percent of the almost unanimously God-believing population of the U.S. — who form the subject of this special issue. They compose what J. Russell Hale calls "the unchurched." We have borrowed the name even though it connotes a passivity that is not characteristic of such individuals. As you will find from the seven interviews that follow, these are people more active, more independent, and perhaps more courageous than most. Their quests have taken three of them to India, one — the youngest — to Japan. Their gurus are Rajneesh, Meher Baba, Sai Baba. It is interesting to observe the influence of age upon them, the oldest being a remarkable illustration of a generation believing mainly in reason, Freud, and societies planned by intelligent men, the youngest embracing chiefly Jung, the Far East, journeys almost wholly inward, communes, and ashrams rather than societies. It is indicative of the spiritual likeness of them all that so many are engaged in service to others — Carol Scholz and her daughter Arianne Kassof at The Hub in Princeton, which is for the retarded and mentally handicapped who these days are no longer kept in state hospitals, Sandy Brainard and his friends at The New Life Center in Lambertville, which is for anyone, ill or well, in search of physical or spiritual health.

Interviews by Paul Griffith and John Glaus *Photographs by Tom Dunham*

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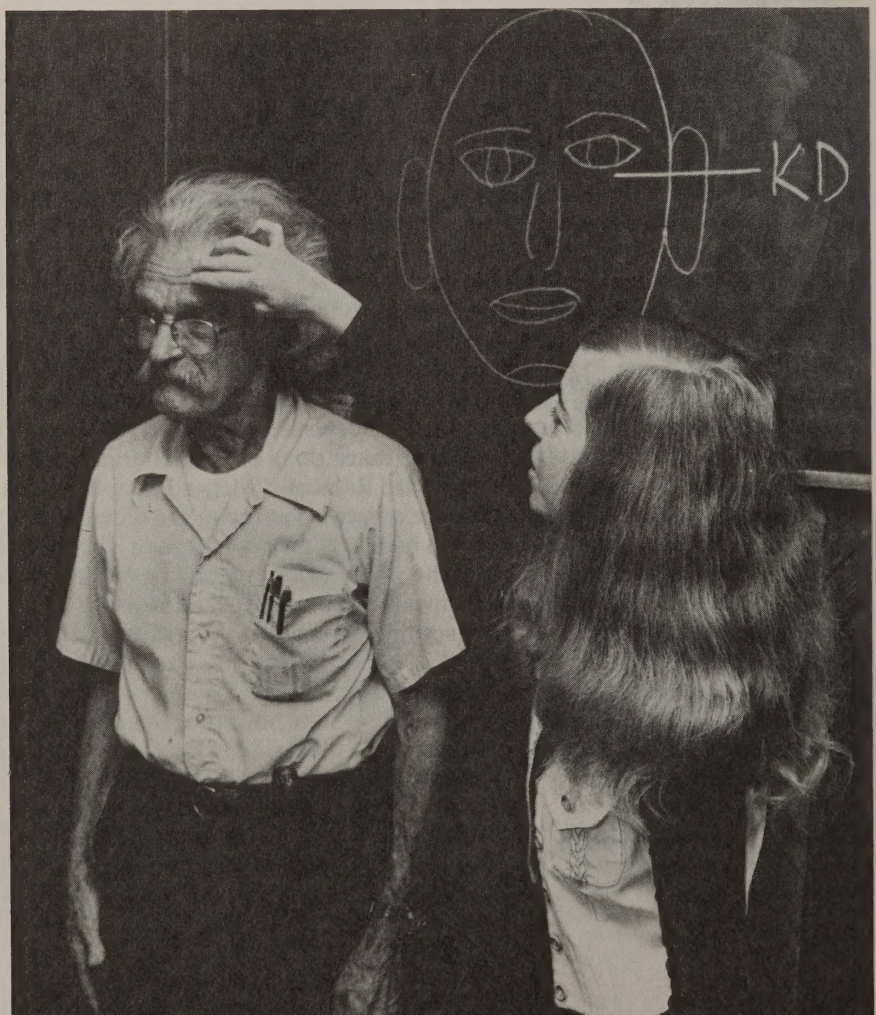
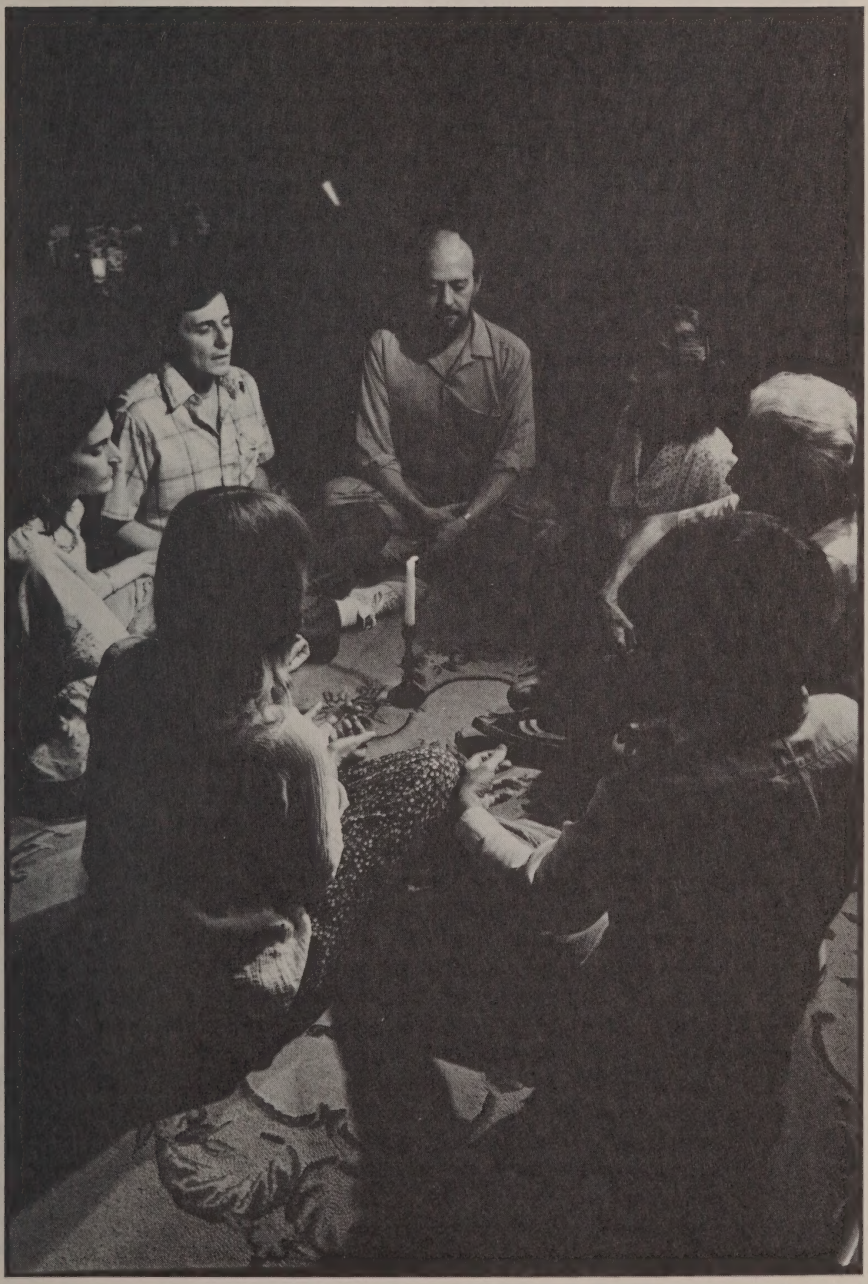
THE UNCHURCHED

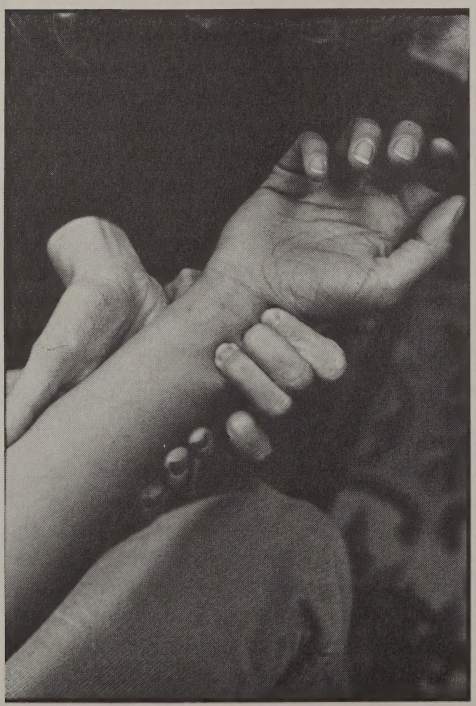
Instead of traditional prayer-meeting or church service, people attend meditation group *(at right)* guided by Sandy Brainard of The New Life Center in Lambertville, New Jersey. They can also receive oriental diagnosis *(below)* from Julie Howard.

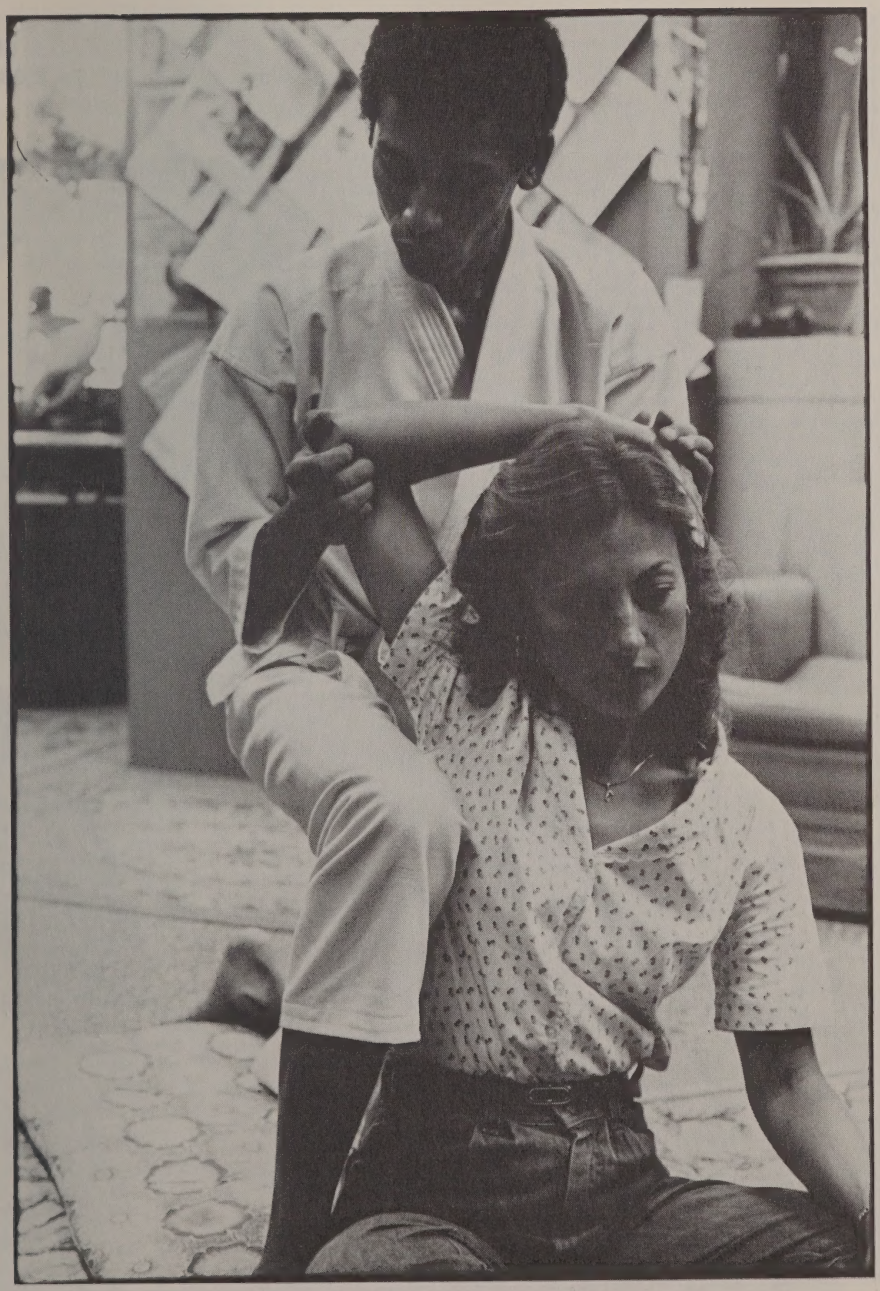




THE UNCHURCHED

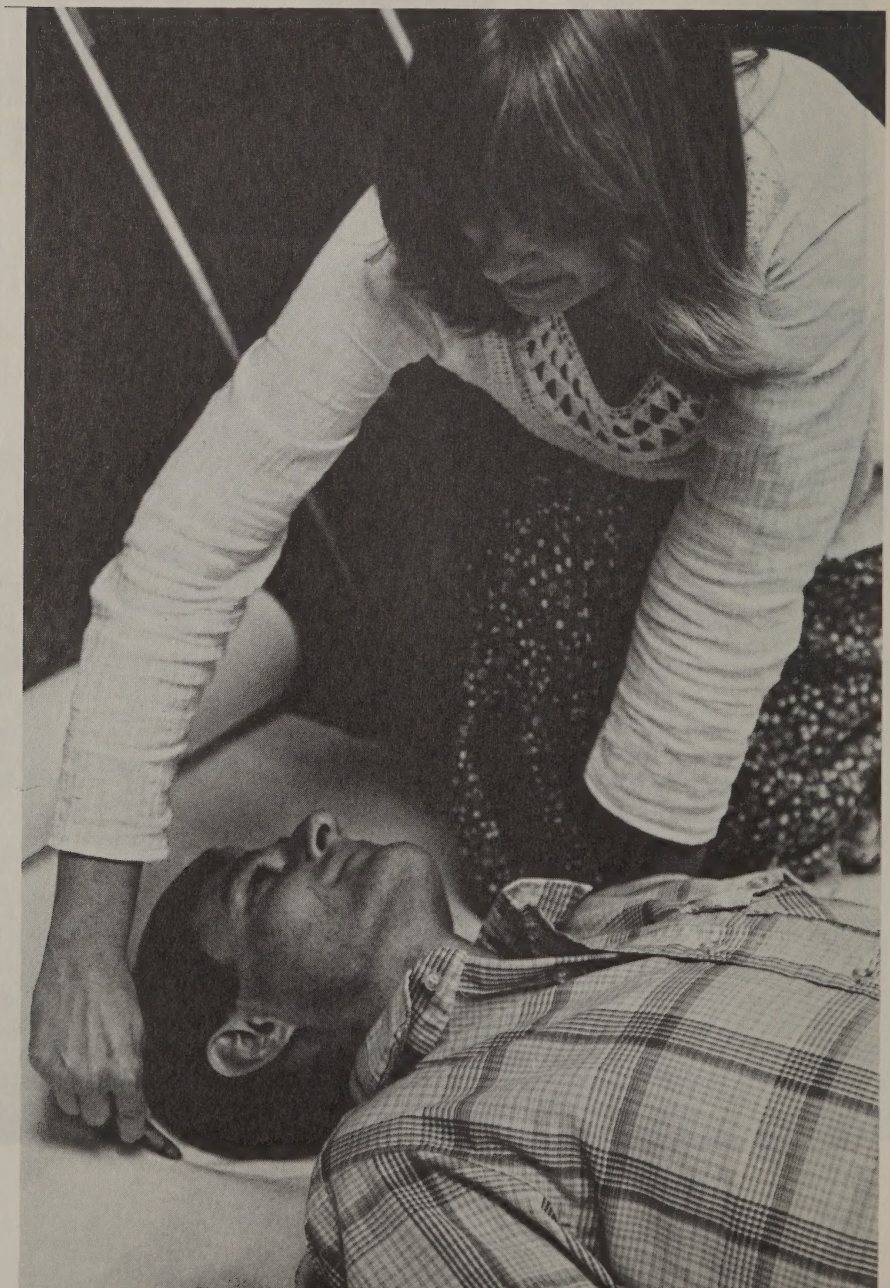
Angelo Lewis's hands employ shiatzu massage to bring relief to The New Life Center's numerous clients. Angelo is new director of center.





THE UNCHURCHED

Susan Pitak *(below)* — another of center's young leaders — practices art therapy. She also pierces hand with a needle *(at right)* during painless demonstration of self-hypnosis.



SANDY BRAINARD: AN IVY-LEAGUE SCIENCE-MAJOR WHO IS "Really in Life"

SANDY: Beginnings usually start in early childhood, but in my particular case they didn't start until "the sophomore slump" in college. I was at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, studying physics and math, where my aptitudes lay. Traditionally, "the sophomore slump" comes at that point when theoretically you choose your profession and determine the whole course of your life for the rest of your life.

I was right up against the realization that there was nothing I wanted to do in life that was worth the effort necessary to do it. It was real meaninglessness. It was this meaninglessness that my prior life had brought me to. I had just enough optimism left not to go off the deep end and wind up schizophrenic.

As a result of the meaninglessness, I flunked out, and flunking out was the beginning of my life. I started to write. My first writings were in little pocket notebooks. I didn't write much in them, but I kept them around. I was selling encyclopedias, and when I rode into Providence, I'd make a note every time I thought I saw a key to the universe or what made life tick.

The semester I flunked out, the only thing I really poured a lot of energy into was a paper about the meaning of life. I divided it up into three categories, all of them, incidentally, pivoting around the fact that you were going to die some day. I was very preoccupied with death. This little person was going to die. How do I handle that? One solution was to get very wrapped up in the moment — to live so violently and actively, in race-car driving and mountain climbing and all that kind of thing, that you stayed in the present. That would keep your mind off the fact that you were ultimately going to die and that in the overall scheme your life was meaningless in this universe which was predetermined, anyway.

I'd become an atheist, although my younger years had had a pretty traditional Protestant background — an Episcopal private school, a Congrega-

(continued on page 10)

tional church, baptism in a Presbyterian church in New York City. As an atheist, I thought that you could kind of cut off the part of yourself that thought about death — that you could do it with drugs or alcohol or sleep. Sleep was a big one for me.

Religion was a second solution. Religion solved the problem of death simply by denying that it existed. But, of course, that was a myth, a concoction, made up in the true Marxian sense of its being "opium for the people," because reality was too painful and what you had to do was make up another reality that was more comfortable to live in and have faith in. I couldn't buy that one.

A third solution was to give one's identity to something that lived a bit longer than you did. To become famous, to get a page in the history books. That was the only solution that seemed at all plausible to me. You might die personally, but you'd have that page in the history books.

However, since my main interest at the time was physics and math, even a page in the history books just didn't hack it in the immensity of the universe.

There was no real solution. Hence it was all meaningless and there was nothing to do.

FIP: This was why you started your notetaking?

SANDY: Yes, my notes were on the reasons people had for living, the values that seemed necessary. As a result, I ended up revising that paper of mine.

My father rescued me at that point. He took me to Hartford, Connecticut, where I worked for my grandparents. They were Baptists and the support of their life was a very active religious life. I was not particularly religious, but it wasn't difficult to see the enormous power of religion in their lives. They were getting on in years, and theirs was the only marriage I'd ever seen that worked.

After that, I went to Paris for about a year, still taking notes. I'm still taking notes.

I finally ended up back in college. I wanted to become an English major in order to learn how to express myself, but Brown felt an English major should study the Victorian poets and that kind of thing, so I stopped majoring in anything in particular. I took courses in things I felt I needed as a human being. I still had the old problem of nothing seeming worth the effort. I really don't know why I didn't cave in at that point.

I got interested in Thoreau and *Walden.* All of a sudden I wanted to know what a mystical experience was. In the edition of *Walden* I read there was note about it's being one of the best expressions of a mystical experience ever written. Then I went on to Whitman and then to the subject of humor. I wanted to understand why people laughed. I did a paper on humor and the philosophy of laughter and resolved it in a very scientific way.

What got me through college was meeting a lady. Allaire. We were very much in love. We were going to get married. The deal was that I was to finish

college first. All of a sudden, with Allaire, I had a reason for living. My studies began to go very well and I got A's and B's as opposed to D's. And I was still very much into philosophy. I took a philosophy of education course. I wanted to become a teacher.

At one point, though, I decided I had gotten my education. So I marched up to the dean's office and announced that I was leaving Brown and was going to teach school. The Dean — Dean Roman — with white hair, an awfully nice guy — sat me down in his office, which was a big antique-filled Ivy League room, and put on his "my boy" manner and pointed out in a paternal fashion that some day in my life I would probably appreciate having an Ivy League diploma. He talked me into it. I worked out an independent studies project called "Man in the Technological Society." It turned out to be a pouring-out of my soul. What happened to me in that paper was a kind of metamorphosis. I began to see there was something fundamental in all the different disciplines. It wasn't so much that I could see the underlying schema as it was a kind of intuitive feeling that it was there if I could only get my hands on it. And that I was not going to find it in the academic environment. Philosophy, for example, is like looking at a lens as opposed to looking at what the lens is focused on.

I started looking elsewhere.

FIP: This was when you got into the occult and metaphysics?

SANDY: Yes, Allaire and I went out to California. She was absolutely disgusted with me for not getting myself a nice, fancy job. The truth was that I was scooping ice cream in an ice-cream parlor — it was 1970, and there weren't many jobs in L.A. So she left.

I got a decent job finally in the architectural planning firm of William Pereira. At that point I moved into an apartment building. Across the way from me there, there was an extremely intelligent individual. I judged him to be very, very bright and equal. We went bar-hopping together. After a while, I learned he believed in astrology. This absolutely blew me away. It was impossible in my scheme of things for somebody as intelligent and well-educated as he to believe in astrology. That was the first jolt.

The second was a wonderful lady who befriended me in the apartment building — Helen, who read Tarot cards for a number of Hollywood movie stars. She started reading mine, and these cards seemed to be following me around. I got disturbed about how uncanny these card readings seemed to be.

Then, shortly after this, UCLA offered a course on this sort of thing. It was called "The Scientific and Mythical Basis of Divinations." It was a very popular course, and the auditorium was jammed. People got up and talked about astrology and Tarot cards and auras — fascinating things that I knew nothing about. Then this gal approached me who turned out to be a psychic belly dancer. She knew all the people who were giving the lectures. We started going out together. We went for a boat ride and I wanted her to demonstrate her psychic powers to me. I said, "Do something, do something!" She said,

"Okay. See that person across the way? In a couple of minutes he's going to get up and move." And, sure enough, he did. It was all very strange — the whole affair, at least to a person of my East Coast upbringing. Although she was a wonderful gal, and the whole situation was wonderful, it was rattling to me, it just scared me to death.

There was one party we went to where there was a family of traveling psychic gypsies in the back room doing readings for the guests. There was a lot of entertainment — your kind of typical L.A. party. There were graphologists who read handwriting. The mother of the gypsy clan was in the back room and she'd concentrate a bit and all this stuff and information about somebody came spilling out. The daughter was doing readings in the front room, too. And there was this tall fellow who was wandering around. I was told later he was actually feeding energy to people. And there was this little baby on the bed, so quiet, not a peep, but so alert it was like an eerie presence. It was as if this child were more intelligent than I.

I was fascinated, and I wanted the gypsy mother to read me, but she said, "You're only curious, aren't you?" She said she needed to do readings for people who really needed help. When the party was over, the gypsies took me home. I was huddled in the back of their car, believing they could read every single thought in my head. At one point, an ambulance passed us, and the gypsies started talking together about the condition of the person in the ambulance — they all agreed the person was losing a lot of blood but would be okay. I was relieved when they finally dropped me off at the apartment.

This period of my life was one where people just picked me up and turned me upside down and rattled me. My whole way of looking at the universe was being totally rattled. It was very strange to me with my math-physics background that here were people with powers that I hadn't even dreamed existed. For instance, about this time, my psychic belly dancer friend found a meditation group that we started attending. A place called Joe's Place.

We went in, and we meditated for the evening, and there was all this talk about the third eye and seeing through the mind's eye. We would sit around, and people who came in could ask a question, and everybody else would try to see the answer psychically through the mind's eye. I asked how I could get my third eye open. According to them, it apparently was already beginning to blink.

I started going to Joe's frequently for something like three or four years. I became the oldest student in the place. I learned how to read cards, about astrology — everything that I could possibly learn. However, I never considered myself to be particularly psychic. It's difficult for someone intellectually oriented to be really intuitive, spontaneous, and psychic. Besides, my main thing was figuring out the universe.

FIP: Did you get into Jung?

SANDY: I was very much interested in Jung. One of the people where I worked got me interested. What interested me mainly were the systems of

The New Life Center's staff relax with Sandy (*at right*) after an evening session involving holistic health workshops in everything from palmistry to plant care, art and art therapy, and life philosophies: Julie Howard, who appears on the cover of this issue, Janet Masucci, who has her own hypnotherapy practice, Angelo Lewis, current director, writer, editor, and practitioner of shiatzu massage, Susan Pitak, who is a sculptress as well as an art therapist and hypnotherapist. Sandy's training includes EST, the Mind Psi-Biotics program.

Western philosophy that dealt with essence. What I wanted to do was synthesize all the systems. They all talked about the same thing — about the life essence, or God. I was beginning to actually believe there was something called God. One of the characteristics of these psychic people was that they all believed in God. They may have characterized God as just a force, like a life force of the universe, but there was something called God. At Joe's, we did an awful lot of praying to this thing that was called God.

FIP: This obviously was a very important time in your life, a very intellectual time.

SANDY: Yes, very. On a typical day, I'd go to work. My office was extremely generous and if there wasn't a lot to do, they'd let me work on my own writing as long as I got my work done. I just churned out writing. Writing was the discipline I'd developed to work out these problems. That came out of the meditation that Joe did, which incidentally, is the kind of meditation I generally teach now in the evenings at the center, it's a guided teacher meditation. Five planes are involved. The physical plane such as we're in now — me chatting with you. Then you close your eyes and fantasize, and that's the next plane. There's a plane just beyond that is like sleep or dreaming. The difference between it and the fantasy plane is that you're no longer the active will that's creating the images you see. You get to a point where the mental content is spontaneously generated and you become just a witness to it. The next two planes have characteristics that have to do with meditation. They involve going beyond into essence.

I really am in life now. I'm a lot more content than I've ever been, and it's fun. Yet it's such a fragile thing. You acquire an awareness that it's a gift that has happened and you'd better not — like I feel at this very moment, that I'm on the verge of talking about it too much. You don't want to talk about it too much. God said, "Okay, we'll give you a little contentment now, but it's not your doing." It's a gift. It's really grace.

FIP: Do you want more coffee?

SANDY: I need some more questions. I need you to talk now.

I should say that my writing grew out of a kind of dialogue between myself and this — this essence of the universe. There was this inner drama. There seem to be five parts of me that were involved in this kind of experience. One of them was this teacher, as I called him, who was very intellectual. There was also one I called The Stillness. It seemed like a big, inner whirlwind that brought answers to all my problems. That was my stillness.

Then there was Sandy — yes, my own character is part of the drama. He was the one with all the problems, the one who rapped with the teacher about them. Then there was another I called The Wheel of Fortune, which represented my day-to-day life. And the fifth part was just me sitting down and doing the writing. All this reminds me of Joe, my meditation teacher. He

looked like a truck driver, but he had his teachers and they were of course all inner ones and all Chinese. As the years went by, he came to look more and more Chinese.

FIP: That explains, I guess, why you sometimes look like a kind of Ivy League saint.

Why don't you tell us how you first came into contact with the guru you've gone twice to India to see — Sai Baba.

SANDY: At this point, in L.A., I was physically in terrible shape and going to a chiropractor. I was looking for a yoga class. I wandered through L.A. and this particular night I was turning left and then right and getting on buses, according to what my inner teacher told me to do. And this particular night I was led to a house with all the lights on. There was a big sign out front and all the sign said was: YOGA. So I went in, and there was this yoga class going on. It was an absolutely beautiful class full of distinctive people. There was a very tall fellow with a handlebar mustache and a much shorter gal wearing a sari who spoke with an accent. This was Indra Devi. I knew she was important because two people asked her while I was there if she would marry them. All over the place were these pictures of a funny, funny man with a smile and an Afro haircut. I didn't think much of them. What impressed me was the room where the yoga class was going on. It had pictures of all the saints and sages of all the great religions around the molding of the ceiling. Wonderful place to be.

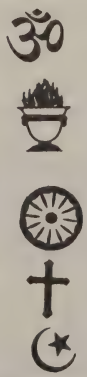
After a while, though, as I went there for the yoga classes, I began to get interested in Sai Baba. The more I found out about him, the more pleased I was with his views and stands on various things. That logo of his — with the symbols of the five major religions of India *(see page 16)* — I love that logo. There's so much about it I really admire. Also I kept a kind of checklist of the requirements I had of the kind of person who knows more than you and can teach you something. One of them was enough wisdom or power to be able to demonstrate power over the material plane. Sai Baba obviously has this power. He was surrounded by miracles more than anybody I ever read about. All those stories. I also wanted him to be loving. I'd hate to have him turn me into a frog or something. He seemed to fill the checklist pretty well. He still does.

Be always on the alert against the four sins which the tongue is prone to commit: speaking falsehood, speaking ill of others, back-biting and talking too much. It is best to attempt to control these tendencies. Try to prevent the five sins that the body commits: killing, adultery, theft, drinking intoxicants and the eating of flesh. It is a great help for the highest life if these also are kept as far away as possible.

— MAXIMS of Sai Baba (see following page)

Statements of Sai Baba's

The logo below is Sai Baba's own, the comments his statements on the five religions of India whose symbols are part of it. Sai Baba was born on November 23, 1926, in Puttaparthi, the village in southern India where he now has his ashram. His numerous writings can be obtained from the Sri Sathya Sai Book Center of America, P.O. Box 278, Tustin, California 92680.



"Listen to the primeval Pranava AUM resounding in your heart as well as in the heart of the Universe." "Offer all bitterness in the sacred Fire and emerge grand, great and godly." "Remember the Wheel of Cause and Consequence, of Deed and Destiny and the Wheel of Dharma that rights them all." "Cut the 'I' feeling clean across and let your ego die on the Cross, to endow on you Eternity." "Be like the Star which never wavers from the Crescent but is fixed in steady faith."

NIRBHA SINGH KHALSA: AN AMERICAN RECEIVES THE SIKH DHARMA AND TELLS OF

"The Valley of Death"

NIRBHA SINGH: It was when I was three years old. It was evening because my parents were downstairs watching TV. I was just lying in bed when I started having the experience of going out of my body. I went through a death process in which I was experiencing the essence of what death is. It was fairly frightening to me. I couldn't control it. It was overwhelming me — I would just leave my body and go out into this place and experience death not on an intellectual level but a conscious feeling level. I gathered all my resources mentally and physically and jumped up from the bed, ran halfway down the stairs, when I came to the realization that my parents couldn't help me with this — that this was something peculiar to my own understanding that I would have to understand by myself.

FIP: At the age of three?

NIRBHA SINGH: At the age of three. So I stayed there on the stairs for anywhere from five minutes to half an hour and then went back upstairs and lay down on the bed and experienced this feeling some more and then went to sleep. There were many experiences like that in my childhood. I can remember riding along in a car. There were five children in our family — I was the second oldest — and we'd all be sitting in the car . . . .

FIP: What was your name before you — ?

NIRBHA SINGH: Britton. Joe Britton.

I can remember sitting in the car with them, and I'd be looking around, and I'd start to have these feelings of dealing with God and reality and wondering what am I? What is the essence of my reality and why am I here on this planet?

I'd look around at my brothers and my sister in the car, and they'd be singing and playing around and doing what all little kids do, and I would wonder, why aren't they thinking about these things, why aren't they questioning what reality is and what is taking place on this planet? It was difficult for me to understand that they weren't questioning as I was.

My parents, who were of Methodist background, would go to church every so often, on Easter, Christmas, and maybe one or two other times during a year. So I would go to church with friends or neighbors or anyone I could go to church with, or I would go by myself and sit there in Sunday school — I loved the old Sunday school teachings — or listen to the regular service. I'd try to absorb what the minister was talking about. Some of the stories fascinated me — such as when Pilate had Jesus in his presence and asked Jesus to perform certain miracles and Jesus denied him these miracles, in fact would only say to Pilate, "The power you have — in the sense of having me here before you — is not your power, this power is from God." Stories like that would fascinate me completely.

It came to a point, though, when there was a change of ministers, and I was sitting in the congregation listening to the sermon. I watched this minister. He kept taking this beautiful masterpiece of a book, the Bible, and read from this part and read from that part. It was all very inspiring. But I could tell that the man himself was intellectually presenting this. The feeling came over that this man, though he was a very kind man, did not have a deep understanding of God-consciousness, of God-reality, of the state of mind Jesus had, and that he was merely someone who was highly trained in dates and facts and such. I couldn't understand why he couldn't be like Jesus, why anyone in the physical form could not also have that reality, that understanding of an expanded state, of a God-conscious state of mind. It was at that point that I started searching for other paths that could enhance my conscious understanding of what reality was.

FIP: How old were you when that happened?

NIRBHA SINGH: I was still in high school. Then I went to college, at Rutgers, and enrolled in the engineering program, and also began to study different religions.

The first I became involved in was Islam. I remember a Sufi who was asked by one of the students what Islam was all about, and the Sufi answered, "For one to understand Islam, you must go through the gates of Islam." I understood from that that there was something much more than just reading books — that you had actually to jump in and practice the technique and experience it if you were going to truly understand what the teachings were all about from the original teachings. So next I got involved in things such as Sufi dancing and reading the Qu'ran, which I found fascinating, an extremely beautiful and mystical work of art. I studied it as much as I could in the environment I was in at college.

Then other things began to capture my interest. First of all, the thing that a lot of my friends were involved in: Zen Buddhism. I read all the books and started learning the techniques of *zazen* and zen sitting. I found these techniques extremely valuable because they were the first organized techniques I'd come across that actually showed you how to meditate. I practiced Zen for a couple of years.

In addition, there were some people in the area who practiced a form of yoga called hatha yoga. I started taking classes. The word *hatha* is derived from the roots "ha" and "tha," which is sun and moon. It is concerned with balancing the energies in the body. It is a form of physical exercise which stimulates parts of the body, certain organs, certain glands, and increases the energy, the life force, the *prana* in these parts. The idea is to balance the physical system first, then you'll be mentally healthy, which in turn means that you'll be spiritually healthy.

When I graduated from Rutgers, I went out to California — to a town in the north called San Rafael, where I'd heard there were people practicing another form of yoga called *kundalini*. I'd heard they got up at four o'clock in the morning and did exercises together and meditated together. They also cooked for each other — a wide arrangement of wholesome vegetarian foods. It was a very inspirational, highly spiritual, enjoyable house to be in. It was truly living in the company of the holy.

I started my classes, and eventually it interested me so much that I was taking two or three a day and was doing four, five, six hours of yoga and meditation. I went through an intensive training program at the 3HO Foundation ashram, got some additional training by Yogi Bhajan, and became a teacher.

In the summer of '71, I came back to New Jersey and moved to Long Beach Island and worked on the beachcomber newspaper, writing articles and designing ads, but people constantly asked me to give kundalini yoga classes, and so I did, giving exercises and meditation, in a dance studio. Within a short time there were forty, fifty, sixty, close to seventy people in each class. I had to sit back and wonder what was going on, why all these people came to the classes. It kind of amazed me.

I went back for further training — down in Washington — and it was shortly after that that I set up the 3HO Foundation and formed the first 3HO ashram down on Long Beach Island. In the beginning, there was really a forming-period for what was to take place in the Foundation. There were all those rules on how you should live and where the TV should be and what kind of food you should prepare and what time to get up and how you should treat one another and how classes should be taught. During that first winter, we didn't have any heat. Our furnace broke, the motor and fan burned out, so we would get up early in the morning and do the exercises in our sleeping-bags. People kept pouring in even though there was no heat. We could see there was a genuine interest for this kind of yoga.

In the spring of '72 I started teaching in other areas — up at Rutgers and down at Stockton College, which was just forming, and in different high schools. I did this until '73, when, during a business conversation with Yogi Bhajan, he turned to me and said, "Why are you not doing engineering?!"

Though I was quite satisfied directing the ashram and teaching yoga classes, I decided to call this engineering firm and inquire if they would be interested in having me work for them, which hopefully they wouldn't be. They asked me to speak to the head of the company, so I went and made

outrageous demands because of my teaching schedule and because of my need to go to Florida in the winter and New Mexico in the summer for 3HO. I thought there was no way he was going to accept this. But, shortly afterwards, he wanted me to start work. And from that time on, I have been earning my living as an engineer doing primarily energy conservation. I've been working for Princeton University for the last five years and enjoy it. I have also been on the physical ed staff, teaching an accredited course in kundalini yoga.

FIP: Tell us about becoming a Sikh.

NIRBHA SINGH: That was an unusual experience. I had been learning about Sikh dharma from my beginning years in 3HO in California. In the fall of '72, these Indian Sikh spiritual teachers were coming to America for the first time. Part of the process of becoming a Sikh involves five men who have already taken vows. They administer vows to anyone interested, and these five men were doing it whether you were American, Indian, or whatever. This sounded pretty fascinating to me, and I studied as much as I could and finally decided to take these particular vows and become a Sikh.

The founder of the Sikhs, Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469, presented the first three vows. The first was that you should rise up before the coming of the light, that is, sunrise, and meditate upon the Creator. The second is that you should earn a righteous living, that is, you should provide your own livelihood and not exist off the work or energy of other people. And the third is that you should be of service to humanity in any way you can whether it is through love, money, or whatever you are able to do.

The next is that you should bow to no man as God — that you should respect all teachers but not worship the man himself and that you should take as your teacher the writings of the Guru Granth Sahib, which are the scriptures of the Sikhs. They are comprised of the writings of forty different teachers from the twelfth up to the seventeenth century. Of those forty, six were Sikh gurus, and the rest either Sufi teachers or Hindu yoga masters, called *bhaghats*, that is, wholly devotional people who lived in villages or in the forests. Different as they are, their writings are very, very similar. It's difficult at times to decipher who actually is doing the writing because the language is God-language. It was all put to music — to *raga*. You can read it, but the more powerful way is to sing it in the form of a rag — a highly structured musical melody.

The book is 1,260 pages long. A very beautiful book. What's unusual about it is that it speaks directly to the mind. It doesn't deal with symbology, it deals with analogy. It will say, "O mind, why are you doing such and such? Why are you involving yourself in lust, anger, greed, pride, and attachment?" It is constantly speaking to the mind. Like a superconscious psychologist, a spiritual psychologist, who is speaking to you.

The fifth vow is that you will maintain what they call the five K's. This involves maintaining the hair — a Sikh never cuts his hair — which is regarded as a gift of God and called the *kesha*. Then there's the *kara*, which is a steel

bracelet, a reminder that your steel — your mettle — will always be tested. Then there's the comb — the *kunga* — that is always to be kept on your person for cleanliness. And there is the *kucheras*, which is the underwear, that represents chastity. Finally, there is the *kirpan*, which is the knife, symbolically representing the sword of righteousness. The Sikh has to take a vow that he will defend the weak and the innocent even at the cost of his own life. If a woman is being raped on the street, it's your obligation to protect that woman even if you must die for her. The sword is always kept on the Skih's person but never can be drawn unless life is at stake.

I took these vows in '72. In '73 I became a Sikh minister. A great privilege was extended to me in 1977 when I became a member of the Khalsa Sikh Council — the governing body for the Sikh dharma in the Western Hemisphere. It's an international organization encompassing all free-world countries outside of India. With fifty lifetime members, the Sikh Council meets three times a year — in New Mexico in summer, Florida during the winter, and Los Angeles, which is the national headquarters, during the spring. I was involved in the Sikh governing board until December '80.

In '80 I officially resigned. I met with Yogi Bhajan, whom I respected personally to the highest extent — he's director of the Sikh dharma in the Western Hemisphere — and told him I felt a need within myself to move to a different path so that I could relate more directly to the Western mind, the American public. On several occasions he asked me to stay, but I thanked him and told him I had to move onto this other path.

My experience with the Sikh religion was extremely beneficial and rich with spiritual lessons. One was the time I went to India. I went to India not so much to explore temples and to seek holy people but to understand the Sikh dharma religion and where its customs and teachers came from. I wanted to find out if the omnipresent feeling of spirituality was indigenous to the soil. Or was it the type of people there? Or the nature of the spiritual climate of Hinduism? Or was it the beauty of the country? Or the climate? I wanted to know why India has such strong, spiritual roots that have been growing for thousands of years.

I took this spiritual journey in '79. I went to Punjab, which is run by the Sikhs. It was an unusual experience. When Indians saw us clad in white clothes and Sikh turbans, they were awe-struck. It was difficult for them to understand Westerners, whom they thought so material minded, turning to something so disciplined as Sikh dharma. They were confused by us and at the same time elated. They wanted to touch our hands and feet just to experience this phenomenon of Americans taking part in the Sikh way of life.

One of our goals on the trip was to go up to this place deep in the Himalayas called Hemkunt Sahib. This was where Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last of the Sikh teachers — who died in 1709 — lived during his last incarnation as Rishi Dashdamin. In his autobiography he described Hemkunt Sahib as a little temple surrounded by the Seven Sister peaks — snow-capped mountains over 20,000 feet high. And there was a little lake by the temple.

When he was in a state of deep meditation, known as *maha samadhi,*

God approached him and told him he must leave this body and take on a new form because of all the turmoil going on in the world. At this time during this experience, he was shown that the roots of all the different religions that had developed on this planet were all the same and that the problems they had with each other were due to the egotistical manipulations of certain teachers. He was asked, instead of living up here on this mountain, to become a spiritual teacher in civilization. He made a request that he be born into the family of Nanak. And he was born the son of the ninth Sikh guru . . . His autobiography describes Hemkunt Sahib, so people had a picture of it geographically, but no one knew where it was until, somewhere around 1930, a Sikh general found it — perfectly set in the Himalayas, with a little temple and a lake, just as it was described in the autobiography. A Shangri-la.

Nowadays this is a pilgrimage place for Sikhs. It takes a hearty individual to get there, a devoted individual. The bus goes to the foothills, five thousand feet up, to the base camp. There the Sherpas load onto their backs the few pieces of luggage you have brought along, while you carry a light day pack. You have to climb from 5,000 feet up to 10,000 feet the first day, approximately seven or eight miles. Although I'd prepared myself for this, I was surprised how rough it was. Within the first half-hour, being so high up, and because the climb was so steep, I was totally exhausted. The blood sugar in my body had been depleted, my bones started aching, my muscles ached, my joints ached, and within a very short time I realized you need much more than a strong physical body to make such a spiritual journey. You needed something more to deal with your spirit. Since my physical energy was depleted, it became very clear that if I went into any kind of negative frame of mind — such as why am I climbing this mountain? why am I walking up with this crazy, rugged, treacherous, steep mountain? — I would not be able to move. The first thing I had to do was go into a neutral state of mind. Then, hopefully, I would pass into a positive one — such as I am enjoying this, I am enjoying the beauty of this mountain, or I am enjoying the jade-green river that is flowing by me, and the snowy peaks and the freshness and pureness of the water coming out of the cracks along the side of the path and the mountain flowers. You have to tap this positive energy to allow the energy to start flowing again. You have to truly tap the energy of your will and your spirit.

This very dramatic example showed me how being in a neutral, or even better, a very positive state of mind, allows you to function, allows energy to come into you, allows you to uplift yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, at any time you want.

There were even more amazing examples. After four or five hours of walking and being really quite exhausted, I would see women of seventy or eighty years walking past me at a very brisk pace, singing these spiritual songs. Here I was — thirty years old, in fairly good condition — and these older people were passing me at this incredible pace, so joyous and happy. It was clear they had tapped into such a rich source of spiritual energy that they could overcome anything.

The top of the mountain was aesthetically a beautiful experience, but the journey to get to the top was a learning process — the excitement, the joy, the challenge.

On the second day you had to go from 10,000 feet up to close to 16,000 feet. That was three-and-a-half miles. Then you had to come back down again the same day. You couldn't stay up there because the weather was too cold. There was snow on top — maybe ten degrees, with a very brisk wind blowing. On top there was a crystal-clear lake, from which you could drink the water which was very sweet. You could also take a dip in it. It was maybe thirty-five degrees. You couldn't stay in it long because it numbed your body immediately. So you immediately jumped out, and it had a strange effect of increasing blood circulation and it kind of warmed you once you got out and dried off. You'd meditate in this cool, serene, and dramatic mountaintop environment for an hour or two and then you'd go back down again.

But on the way down I felt symptoms developing of some form of dysentery, and it was making me weaker and weaker all the way down. Then, a couple of days later, we had to get on a bus and ride down to Hardwar, where we caught a train. And by the time I was on the train, I was no longer able to keep any water inside of me. My body was rejecting it and all food.

Once reaching Amritsar, where our journey began, the accommodations were pretty good, and people gave me all sorts of treatments, but nothing seemed to be working, and I found I could see from my window the Golden Temple. The temple is made completely of gold and marble and studded with jewels. It's a spectacular, high-vibrational, highly inspirational place. I decided I would have to go there before my dysentery problem got any worse.

I half walked over and half crawled over to it and sat there for several hours and just absorbed myself in the music that goes on for twenty-four hours a day. And, after I was spiritually full, I left — I could hardly walk. Then I remember several Indian Sikhs rushing to me and surrounding me and just wanting to touch me and my clothes and my shoulders — and I started dropping. I couldn't hold the weight of all the people on me. I dropped to my knees, and they just crowded around and held me up and ushered me back to the room I was staying in. A short time after that, I was lying on my back and started feeling myself going out of my body.

I was projected into a very deep, dark valley, and it was the valley of death. The darkness in the valley was not just a physical, visual darkness, such as being in a closet with no lights, but a much deeper darkness. As I went through the valley, I was being shown everything that had ever taken place in my life — things I'd long, long forgotten about, things from very, very early childhood. I was shown how I had handled relationships. I was shown things that had happened in my work experience. I was shown my whole progression on all levels, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Going through the valley of death, the ego is not there. What takes place on regular earth-plane living is that the ego protects us from things that are not quite right, things we do that we know there's a better way of doing and do them, anyway, because it serves us. Our ego can justify it, and by justify-

ing it, allows us to keep on doing whatever we're doing in life.

But in this place, the ego is not there to protect you. So the experiences there are in their raw form.

In this place, you experience the not-so-nice things to an overwhelming degree. And you experience the nice things to an overwhelming degree. It's too overwhelming to experience in a physical body.

As you travel through the valley of death, you don't take anything with you other than what you consciously are. What you consciously are is a product of all that you were. And you're surrounded by that, and you experience it to the fullest, and you go through a hell-state, and in this place there is no time. You're in another dimension. Time's not an aspect of this dimension. So, while you're going through the hell of your own mind, you have the feeling and the understanding that you're there for eternity.

I also tried calling upon Guru Ram Das, who was the fourth of the Sikh teachers — he was a figure such as Christ is to Christianity — and that also brought light into the tunnel.

Both of these things were highly beneficial. And, after I finished, I tried other techniques of meditation, and singing like angels went on inside my mind. I saw very clearly that the extent to which I would experience this light was going to be determined by how much faith I had in God.

Now, my whole life, I had studied about faith. Faith is taught in all religions, and I thought I had a fairly strong intellectual grasp of what faith is. I saw at that moment very clearly, very vividly, in all ways imaginable, the level, strength, and depth of my faith in God. I knew exactly where I stood.

More and more light came into the tunnel, into this hell-state, and I also saw that people must go through the hell-state — they must go through it with their own mind and are tested in it.

It was shortly after that, when the light started coming, that I saw I had the option of coming back or staying there.

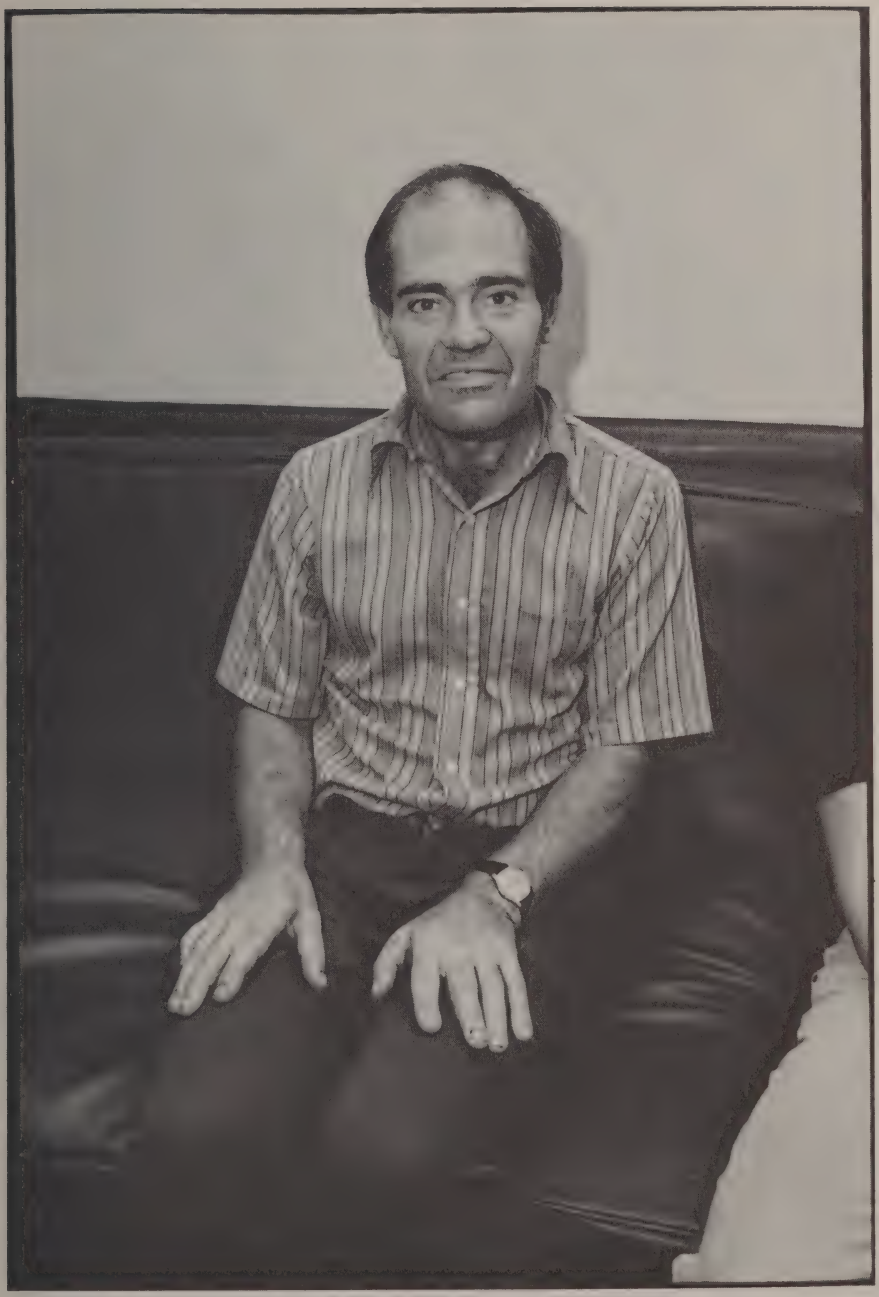
And I came back.

Not long after that, the doctor came in and put me on an I.V. When I became conscious again, I said to the doctor, "When does my plane leave?" This was on Wednesday. He said, "This is Wednesday, and your plane is leaving on Friday, but you're going to be here for at least two weeks flat on your back." I said, no, I was going to leave on Friday. And, on Friday morning, I got up out of bed and took my luggage and flew to New Delhi and then to Bombay and then home. When I arrived in America, everything was fine. I felt as healthy as I'd ever felt.

When there is an end to a search, you have found. So long as there is a search, you are searching. Where to end the search, that is the question. End the search where you meet a man of faith. Who is a man of faith? Talk to him on any facet; if through every talk he shows you the path of God, you have found him. — From THE TEACHINGS OF YOGI BHAJAN

THE UNCHURCHED

The Hub is a social center for mentally and emotionally handicapped residents of Princeton. Established in 1979 by Princeton's religious organizations, it is open Friday afternoons and Saturday nights for men and women to gather for coffee, snacks, games, records, company. Some simply want to sit by themselves. Others *(above)* enjoy themselves.



TRENTON

THE UNCHURCHED

The sociabilities and pleasures of The Hub include listening to music *(below)*. All of its activities are under the direction of Arianne Kassof, who is not only there when it is open, but tries to get the community concerned, finds volunteers to help, and enlists the aid of her mother Dr. Carol Scholz *(the two of them are shown in their Princeton home at right)*.

CAROL SCHOLZ:

"Doing the Best We Know"

FIP: Having visited The Princeton Hub, which your daughter Arianne Kassof runs for the mentally and emotionally handicapped, I wonder what connection there is between your service to your fellow beings and your religious feelings. I know you attend Friends' meeting.

CAROL: I don't really go much to meeting. I enjoy the committee work, the summer suppers, and so forth. The fact is that I haven't found anything really like what people regard as the spiritual side of religion. I love to see mountains, grapevines, and beautiful views, and that's as close to a religious feeling as I have had. I haven't gotten it in meeting or in magnificent cathedrals. For one thing, cathedrals seem too dark.

My parents were both children of Bucks County, Pa., farmers. They met back in the 1880's, when both were trying to save money to go to medical school. My mother's family were Friends — that is, Quakers — who had come over with William Penn. My father was Dutch Reform, which was like a strict version of Lutheranism. They were engaged for nine years, and in that time they were reading new bestsellers like Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and Lecky's *History of European Morals*, and these books changed their views somewhat and they finally compromised on Unitarianism. The Friends, with no church service, no music, were a little far out for my father. My brothers and I were supposed to be brought up Unitarian, but we were sent to Friends' schools in Philadelphia. When I was a junior at Swarthmore College, I sort of joined the Friends because it was a religion that did not ask you to accept things that I couldn't accept — virgin births — a whole lot of things, including ritual that seemed a big inconvenience to me.

Although I have not found any satisfaction in religious services, I do believe there is a dualism in the universe — that there's a force for destruction and a force for creation, one for hate and one for love. I put myself under love and creation.

FIP: Since you say you hold no religious views, why did you make that choice?

CAROL: I suppose because I was loved as a child and my parents weren't keeping me to pay their debts. I am a little disturbed with myself recently. I'm nearly 78 and healthier than most people my age, but last winter, when I was recovering from an auto accident and the flu, I was under the weather. I didn't have a car for three weeks and I didn't feel well — and I had to ask

help from people. And that embarrassed me terribly. It may seem a bit arrogant of me, but I always wanted to be the one to give and never the one to take.

Meanwhile, I ought to add, I am trying to do enough with people so I feel I have, so to speak, some money in the bank.

I am rather lazy, but I do do some things. I particularly enjoy coaching my oriental students in English. Graduate students from China. Because orientals really like and respect older people, whereas Americans neither like them nor respect them. I'm sick of Americans not liking old people, particularly old women. I've been one for a few years now, and I have to build my ego up every week by working with my Chinese students who do like me. I have seen over and over the way people look down on old people in this country.

I can understand some of it. I have spent time visiting people in nursing homes and I find them terribly, terribly depressing places. Most of the old people are uninterested and demanding and totally unattractive.

Human contact is absolutely necessary for human beings. I think what we want most is to be loved and admired. In the last few years, when I couldn't get my dissertation and other writings published, I decided to stop wasting time, so I turned back to working with people. My family has always been people who try to help other people — either professors or doctors.

Originally, as a child, I was either going to become a doctor or write the great American novel. I never did either. But, when I was 38, I had a son, and my husband was 54, and simple arithmetic showed that my husband would be retired by the time our son was only 16. So I went to a psychiatrist I knew, and his suggestion was instead of going to medical school I ought to become a psychiatric social worker. That meant I had to do a psychoanalysis. I still believe that to help other people you have to be able to understand yourself really well.

I worked as my psychiatrist's chief psychiatric assistant for many years, mainly in child-guidance clinics, where I worked with parents on the problems of their children although I did see some children and a good number of adolescent girls. It's interesting that you don't get anywhere straightening out family difficulties until the parents begin to talk about their own childhoods and where their feelings came from.

Nowadays, I am more of a friend to people I'm helping than a social worker or therapist. This is probably better.

I worry about people. There's one young man in town I like very much. He has a lot of kindness and good humor. He's very good to other people. But he has tried every church in town and been put out of them because he sometimes interferes — when someone's preaching, he is apt to make rude comments very loudly. He did this to a woman-preacher I know in town, and she didn't react to his comments the way others did. She talked to him afterwards and found he was studying Islam and other Eastern religions. The other day he said to me, "I think I'd better stop trying to find the answer in religion. I think I have to find the answer in myself." Which, I think, is right

to the point.

All three of my children married people of Jewish descent. None of them attend churches. Before the Holocaust, most educated Jews had left their religion. But a great many have gone back to it. All of my family is highly ethical. Arianne is working for The Hub, which is run by Princeton's religious organizations. Arianne worked at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass., while her husband was doing his graduate work. McLean is one of the oldest mental hospitals. She was a librarian and made friends with some of the patients. Except cleaning women and gardeners who had contact with them she was practically the only one who knew them. That was her background for the work she's doing at The Hub. Also, during her childhood, we had several ex-mental patients living with us and she got to feel at ease with people who are mentally ill.

FIP: You see goodness as being passed down from one human generation to the next, don't you?

CAROL: Yes, people have to be loved to be able to love.

As you know, I am not entirely comfortable talking about this sort of thing. I once wrote a bad poem that went:

> Such certainties I live without.
> As for me, I worship doubt.

My personal philosophy, such as it is, allows room for change and growth. For example. In my lifetime I have seen sex change from bad, dirty, and dangerous to good, clean, and creative. Churches have changed from infallible, stupid, and reactionary to benevolent, cooperative, and open-minded. I have come to realize that the most dangerous people in the world are those who believe they have the whole truth and think everyone else is wrong. I am in favor of anything ecumenical, interracial, international, and . . . bisexual.

There's another verse, this one from *Candide:*

> We're neither grave, nor wise, nor good. We'll do the best we know. We'll build our house and chop our wood and let our garden grow.

FIP: That seems to be a fitting title for this interview — "We'll do the best we know." Do you mind our printing it?

CAROL: No, just don't print my weight. I've always been perfectly comfortable revealing my age and income, but I've always been sensitive about my weight!

GEORGE SCHLOSS: A NEW YORKER'S EXPERIENCES WITH "Holy Alcohol"

FIP: You use a phrase — "holy alcohol" — which both shocks people and intrigues them. What do you mean by the phrase?

GEORGE: There's a Hindu phrase, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" Let's do it that way.

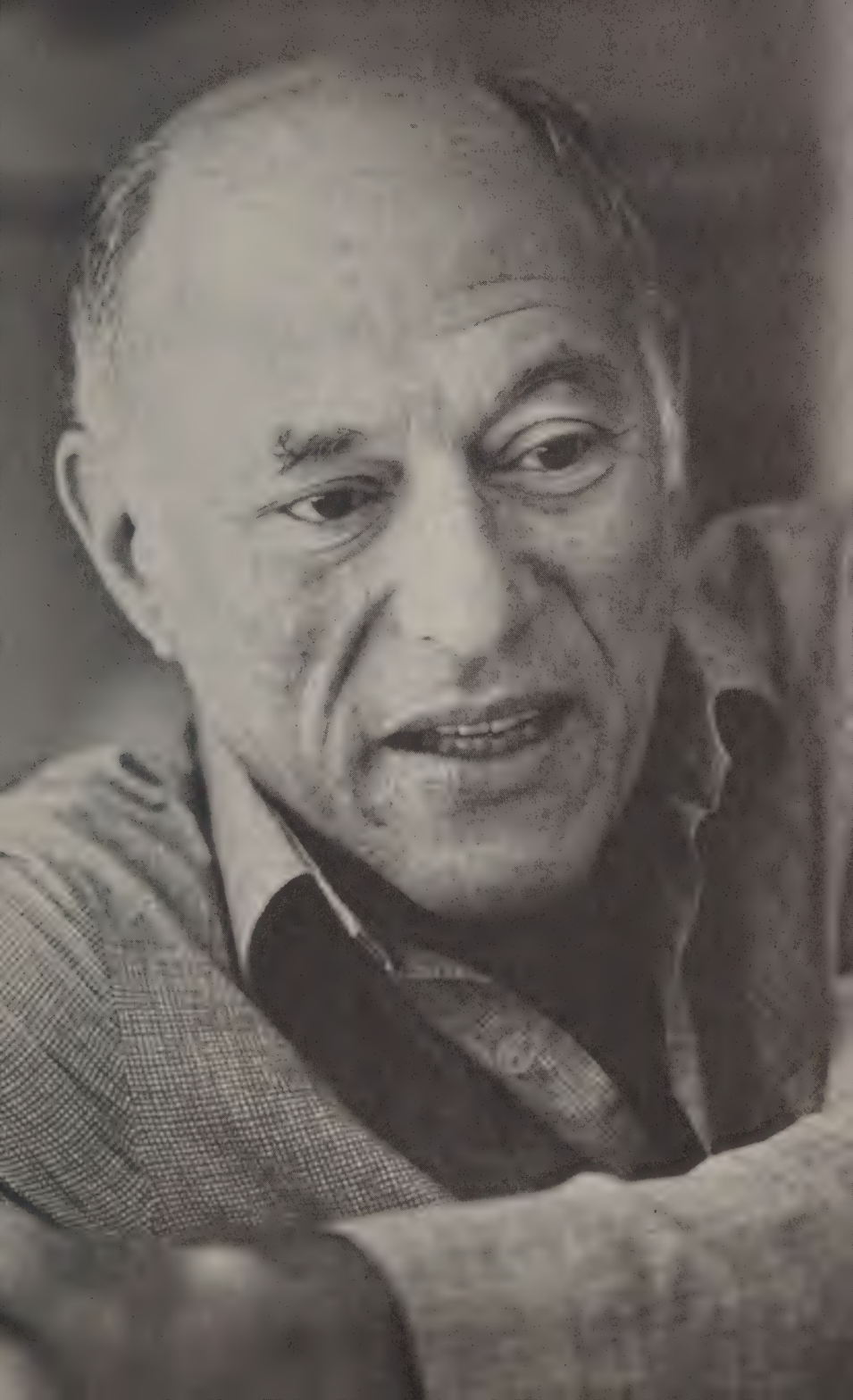
In terms of spirituality, I was born of liberated Jewish parents. Both had come from the Lower East Side and had done well. Except for the occasional religious holiday, there was very little religious talk in my house.

At about thirteen or fourteen, I went through some sort of adolescent crisis, and from a very outgoing, almost aggressive young boy became rather withdrawn and "sensitive to a fault."

I used to think sensitivity was wonderful. I don't think it's so wonderful any more. It's a very, very nice form of egotism.

I think of myself at thirteen, fourteen, or fifteen as disillusioned. And I was. I had a grandmother who still held onto some of the old ways, and at her request I was "barmitzvahed," which in the Jewish tradition is like a confirmation and indicates the rite of passage from childhood to manhood. The local rabbi came to my house on Friday nights. He was a young fellow and liked to think of himself as a swinger. He used to give me cigarettes. At any rate, I learned the prayers for the ceremony. The great holy prayer of Israel was spelled out to me, and I had no idea what it meant — it was never translated for me. About two days before the ceremony, they took me into the temple and up to the ark and showed me the scroll and said, "You're going to hold this, and remember, when you read" — and I was not reading at all, I was reciting — "remember to move your head from right to left." That struck me as the height of hypocrisy.

For the next five or six years I was — not an atheist — but certainly an agnostic. I went into the army, spent three years in England and France, and found out that war for me was generally just waiting around. While I was waiting, I began to do a lot of reading and thinking. The writers who had the most influence on me were those who were philosophically geared to some sort of spiritual element in the world. I read Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy,* which was a kind of bestseller and a precursor of a lot of what I consider rather free-swinging stuff that's come out since. A lot of the drug scene came out of his experiments. Aside from that, he did a wonderful bibliography, which I explored. I also remember reading Saint Teresa of Avila at the age of twenty or twenty-one — it was like going into science fiction. It was a completely new world, a world I had no idea existed. I'd grown up on the novels of Dickens, Balzac, and Mark Twain. And here was a world



that had tremendous appeal. . . . I felt there was something greater than myself. I didn't know what it was. I was reasonably convinced intellectually that there was a God, that there was something — or I suspected there was something. And I let it go at that.

FIP: Most of us are unwilling to go any farther than that unless we have to, unless we suffer too much pain.

GEORGE: Yes. I then married. I was much too young, twenty-four or twenty-five. We deliberately got married on Bastille Day and sang the Marseillaise and everything. I recognized almost immediately that I had made the wrong choice or that my wife had made it, that it was not a good marriage, yet both of us being children of divorced parents, we were fierce in our opposition to divorce and stayed married. It was compounded soon after with the birth of my first son. In this period — since I was fortunate enough to have an interest in the family business, which didn't require too much of my attention — I was almost totally withdrawn and isolated. Just as I had been at thirteen and fourteen. I lived in a little farmhouse in the country and began following up the reading that led from Huxley and the others. We had neighbors there who were born Catholics. They had five or six kids, very little money, while we had one child and a sizable stipend, and they seemed to have something I wanted. A kind of acceptance of whatever came, of trusting God to look after them. I felt this undercurrent sustaining them all the time.

So I began reading the Catholic writers, especially the medieval mystics. Meister Eckhart had a tremendous influence on me. And one thing led to another, and one day I was walking in this lovely little town we lived in and right on the green was the local Catholic church, which, unlike most Catholic churches, was quite presentable. On the impulse, I rang the doorbell and asked for the parish priest. He happened to be in, and I told him I wanted to take instruction and become a Catholic. I felt a real sense of exhilaration that I was on the threshold of something extraordinary and wonderful which was only to be matched later by my entrance into actual drinking and, later than that, by my entrance into Alcoholics Anonymous. At any rate, the priest took me in.

FIP: You were thirty then?

GEORGE: Yes, it was 1952 — I was thirty. I went for instruction two or three times a week. When I broke the news to my Catholic friends, they almost fell over backwards. They agreed to sponsor me, and the man agreed to be my godfather, and we went to the baptismal font and I was baptized. My wife, incidentally, didn't come to the baptism. She never said a word about my becoming a Catholic.

I continued to go to mass and become very involved. I was sort of a medal in the lapel of the priest. I mean, here was a real miracle! There was a great deal of romanticism in this. It was extraordinary. Not one person from

that church with the exception of the priest ever said so much as a word to me. For a year and a half I had absolutely no relationships with anybody. My contact with the church was saying my prayers, going to confession, observing the various feast days, saying vigils and masses, and so on. I was as forlorn as an urchin starving outside a restaurant.

FIP: Quite different from the experience you had when you went to AA?

GEORGE: Yes, I was asked to come in and dine. That was the difference between my flirtation with Roman Catholicism and my commitment to AA.

FIP: What do you think that reserve was?

GEORGE: I don't know. I think it was what Max Weber calls the bureaucratization of belief. I did go on a couple of retreats. When there was contact, it would be with an intellectual priest who was delighted that I'd read Thomas Merton. And then I'd never see him again. There was just no living support.

I suppose it's the routinization of the church. That's why they can't keep people. Everybody seems to be so isolated in his or her cell. So, while my entrance into the church had been very sincere, my exit from it was not even insincere, just gradual. No doubt if I'd stayed in New York — my friends were beat types, Bohemians, Village cats, stuff like that — I would have gotten involved with the Dorothy Day bunch. But, up in New York State, there wasn't anybody around. I left because I had to leave, and there were no arguments or apologies to be made.

That did leave a gap in my life, so I began attending a Vedanta center up in the West 70's off Central Park. I picked up a little book — life is full of these marvelous ironies, especially the spiritual life — called *Practical Mysticism* by Evelyn Underhill. I read it, and all these very exotic romantic things I was trying like sitting in the lotus position in a little room in a barn I had set off for the purpose — Evelyn Underhill suggested that to still the mind all that was necessary was to sit comfortably in a chair, in some loose clothes, preferably not after eating a heavy meal, and if the light was not too bright, just sit there and become one-pointed. Maybe I was a natural ecstatic. It certainly came easy for me. On the third or fourth attempt, I was absolutely astounded at what happened. I began to practice inversion. I can only describe it as like a whirlpool but instead of gushing out, it went in. And then I became literally orgasmic. Later, when I was in India, I found out I had probably activated without knowing it, the kundalini.

It was April twenty-third — I remember the date because it was Shakespeare's birthday. It was like living on two levels. I was quite aware of what was happening — it wasn't some sort of shamanistic trance or blacking-out or anything like that — it was like I was my own observer. I remember sitting in that wicker chair and sensing this perpetual orgasm which never ends and you never get enough and yet you never want any more and yet it's

just there. It's a kind of satiety which has no weariness in it. It's difficult to describe. Wiser men than I have trouble describing it . . . .

I can remember, for instance, going out of the barn and looking at the grass and everything stopped and I could literally see the grass grow. And again, as I recall, there's something called *a mithuna*, which is the way you withhold sperm, and this apparently was what was happening to me. I was in this orgasm for just about three days. I looked at my wife, and I can honestly say — this is a terrible thing to admit — for the first time I loved her. I loved everything and loved everyone. It was as if I'd been enlarged into nothingness.

I was also, thank God, prudent enough to realize this was not something to be played with. I gradually came down off it, and it gave me once and for all an absolutely certainty through experience — it was almost as if I had tasted the substance of what *is* — and from that date I have never had any doubt as to what is real. I had a friend, a brilliant playwright and poet, who started fooling around with that sort of thing and with drugs who literally went off the deep end and has never come back. The last I heard he had been institutionalized.

FIP: Disciplines are explicit about not playing around with these things without guidance.

GEORGE: Yes. Some time later I was tempted and tried to bring on this state or whatever you'd call it again, and it had much less impact and would confirm me in my view: don't play around with such things.

FIP: What date was this?

GEORGE: About 1955 or 1956. I had a dream about the Buddha which I later went to see — I forget where it is, but somewhere in India there's this great *stupa* of the Buddha — it's enormous — and he was sitting there and smiling at me and saying, "It's all the same." At this time I was very involved with three things: whether or not to separate from my wife, my religious pretensions — I insist on calling them that — and my sense of self-righteousness. I couldn't see myself as divorced. Holy men are never divorced. True, many holy men never marry and have children. But, anyway, I had set up this absolutely impossible ideal against the reality of what was happening to me.

I interpreted the Buddha's words in my own amateur way. I don't recommend this kind of thing to anybody, but at that time things that are available to Westerners now just were not there. Even the books that I sent to England for and waited months to get are all out in paperback now and available to high school kids. I don't know whether that's good, either.

What I see now as I look back is that from the age of sixteen or seventeen I had been slowly and gradually destroying my house because something in me knew that it was built on false foundations. One of the things that prompts

me to live my life in a certain way, which in my case is that of the alcoholic personality, is that I was all-or-nothing. It just wasn't worth it to me to live the ordinary, unenlightened, routine life. The fact that I live an extremely routine life now and love it is something else again because I can say that I've come across to the other shore and that however small my tent may be, it's mine.

As I see now, I was in the process of destroying my house and my being — whatever it was that passed for me. I began playing the middle-age syndrome. I had a couple of affairs with women, which at first were very pleasureable and certainly very ego-satisfying, yet at the end I found I was not fond of promiscuity. At the end of the second affair, which turned out to be a rather unhappy thing, I separated from my wife for the first time.

I was working on a book, incidentally, by Hubert Benoit. He wrote a wonderful one called *Supreme Doctrine*, then another called *Metaphysics and Psychoanalysis*, and another called *Letting Go*, which was the one I was reading in French. That prompted me to combine the separation with a trip to France to ask permission to translate it. That didn't work out. It was already being translated. So I decided to stay on in France, and by this time I had begun to drink. Only for social reasons — an apértif with lunch and a little glass of wine and an apértif with dinner.

I decided to go home. Rather than go through Europe I went via Israel and India. I walked on foot to the River Jordan and spent the night at a hostel in Bethlehem and saw all the holy places. I was wearing a beard and shorts and sandals, but I made the trip, I flatter myself, before it was fashionable.

My first day in India I ended up sleeping on the lawn of one of the fancy hotels because I couldn't get a room. I saw the sights in New Delhi. I heard a marvelous musician named Ravi Shankar. And I went up to Hardva, which is one of the holy cities about two hundred miles north, and on from there to Rishikesh, which wasn't far, maybe twenty or thirty miles. Rishikesh is the navel of India — the center where the electricity of the spirit is transmitted. The name, I think, means "place of the wise man or sage." I had heard Swami Shivananda had an ashram there. I got there by walking and taking a *tonga*, which is a kind of cart drawn by a buffalo. It turned out to be really nothing of a place, just a series of steps down to the Ganges, and a hostel — a great massive brick pile — that was available to pilgrims. To get to it you had to take a raft, a raft with a bench on it and ferrymen with poles, and since it was late in the afternoon and the sun was going down, I felt it was another world. Like in Hermann Hesse. Absolutely glorious.

I was the only person on the raft until a little fat Hindu arrived, who was obviously extraordinarily wealthy — in India, when you're rich, you're very, very rich, and when you're poor, you're very, very poor. This man sat down beside me and sort of patted me on the knee and said in perfect English: "Where are you from, my friend?"

I told him I was from Connecticut but had grown up in New York.

"That's very interesting," he said. "I was in New York last week. I am

in the textile business." And he mentioned a gentleman in New York who was one of my family's tenants in the garment district. His name was Rosenberg and he was the fat little Hindu's partner! I thought I'd fall over backwards. He wondered what I was doing in India.

I told him, and he said, "Very interesting. You come with me."

I then learned that he was a devout Brahmin without any gift for the contemplative life himself who once a year took his retreat with his yogi who came down from the mountains. He led me to his ashram, which was about two or three miles away, and introduced me to some of the acolytes and disciples of his yogi. It was an extraordinary experience for a modern Westerner to see them sitting there on their nails in their caves. We finally came to this little stone enclave and I was introduced to his yogi and assigned a little stone cell. I sat there and smoked and they told me where to go for a bite to eat — some bananas, some pita bread, and some tea. And the next morning at three-thirty A.M. I was awakened and invited into the hall. The yogi was seated on a dais surrounded by ten or fifteen of his disciples. At the foot of where he was sitting in the lotus position there was a candle.

Well, I sat there on the stone floor for fifteen minutes and then a half hour and then two hours and I thought I was going to go out of my skin. I suppose I could have gotten up and left, but I couldn't do anything like that. Finally it was over, and I found it was about seven A.M. And I was ready to go out of my mind. There was no need to say anything. Neither the yogi nor any of the disciples spoke English, anyway, and I think the yogi had nothing but scorn for people who tried to convert others to Vedanta. I gathered you just didn't do that sort of thing. If God had wanted the world to be Hindu, he would have made everyone a Hindu. Incidentally, the lowest of the outcasts was considered higher on the rung than I — and he probably was, in terms of spiritual development.

These sessions from three-thirty in the morning until seven I was allowed to watch. There was a man there well over seventy whom I saw stand on his thumbs without any effort whatsoever. I saw him literally direct the current to his calves and feet. I had read about this stuff, of course, but it didn't really attract me, and they weren't presenting it as a way of life.

They were served breakfast, but I would wind my way down to a little canteen and then I'd come back and bathe in the Ganges and drink from it because it's pure there. And I had the extraordinary experience of having fish literally come up and look at me and swim through my legs because they had never been killed up there from the beginning of time.

And then there was a rest-period devoted to reading, and I would talk to my Brahmin friend, who only stayed a week, and then to a Frenchman, a planter from Mozambique, with whom I could speak because my French was pretty good. Next came a theoretical class which I could not understand. And this went on for about two or three weeks, and I was beginning to get bored. I was making no headway whatsoever.

There was a boy who had attached himself to the guru from the time he had been about nine. He was one of those waifs you see in India. Whether or

not he was an Untouchable, I don't know. By this time he was about fourteen. He was illiterate. And I've never seen such total humility. It was my first contact with the way the world was until a hundred or two hundred years ago. First of all, the boy was always pleasant. He was always smiling, and his job was to serve everyone, including me. There was no latrine, but a kind of stone wall behind the ashram where you relieved yourself, and this boy would clean that up. He was like a little monkey, always chattering away, extraordinarily happy, with the most marvelous eyes in the world. There was also another young fellow — Dapur — about eighteen, a high-caste Brahmin, who was about to go to Oxford — and he had been sent there by his father to purify himself and keep him from becoming corrupt. He, incidentally, could speak perfect English and so he started to translate for me. He finally arranged for an interview with the yogi for me. The yogi looked at me and said in effect: "You go home. Your way is not here."

"But will I find my way?" I said.

And he said, "Yes, you will find your way."

I didn't really believe him and yet I did, so I left and stayed at a hotel in Bombay and got drunk and went after some beautiful girls but didn't succeed. I went to Calcutta and then to Japan — to a Zen monastery outside of Kyoto, but it was almost like staying at a hotel, I was so satiated by then.

I knew that whatever it was that I was headed for — and I saw no light at the end of the tunnel — it would have nothing to do with the visible. Thanks to India, that was gone forever.

FIP: You came back to the U.S.? When was that?

GEORGE: 1960, 1961, 1962. Now we get into the part about "holy alcohol." Because I began to drink. There were many reasons for it: I was getting into my forties, I had tried everything, and I had this tremendous sense of disappointment — I'd tried Catholicism and Vedanta and had had those peak experiences in India, and nothing had happened. I was in worse shape than when I had left. Ten years had passed and I had nothing to show for them but a bad marriage and a dreadful feeling of despair.

I came back and I reconciled with my wife, but it was no go.

I am sure that disillusionment was absolutely necessary for me because that's when it really began to happen.

I wrote a play — I spent about two or three years on that, and that helped me. It's a curious thing how unconscious you can be. I thought the play was about one thing when actually it was about Adam and Eve and what happened to their sons and daughters, and when I finished it, I realized that the end of the play was a cry for help. There's a long speech addressed to the audience on the part of Cain, which is a cry for help, but I didn't notice that, of course, until years later when I finally got the courage to reread it. It was not a very good play, incidentally, but it got me over two or three years.

Then, in the absolute depths of despair, I decided to reactivate the whirpool-inversion thing again. We had a third-floor attic, and I went up

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GARNETTE ARLEDGE: AN ARTIST/MOTHER OBEYS THE "Direction of the Heart"

FIP: From what we know of your background, you have had several close encounters with various religious and non-sectarian groups.

GARNETTE: I was never a cynic, but then I was never a believer. I had always been the type of person who laughed at people who went to church. I never felt the necessity to find something to believe in. I distinctly remember an occurrence concerning our neighbor's son who was involved in drugs. My husband said that they had done everything possible to help him. They went hiking, they read together, they had a musical life, they had everything and they also went to church. That was a mistake. So we had a good laugh, and that, as far as I was concerned, was that. You see I had no idea, I could not understand a person's reason for wanting to go to church.

At this time I began to experience a spiritual thirst, which at first was hardly noticeable, but it grew and grew. On a whim I was taken to a workshop led by Joseph Campbell and Sam Keen. It was a yoga workshop. Joseph Campbell was explaining in the most eloquent and vivid imagery the meaning of the *chakras.* He told us that the *chakras* were the psychic centers of the body, that each person had them and that they could be developed. He explained that there was the first *chakra* which concerned survival, the second which was sexual, the third was ego, the fourth was the heart, the fifth was intuition, the sixth was the third eye, and the seventh was universal energy. The whole thing was very well done. They started at the first and after each *chakra*, they led us through a meditation. There were approximately two thousand people in the chapel where this took place. It was a remarkable experience to do this in the presence of so many people. It leaves you with a definite impression, an imprint of lasting significance.

FIP: Was it at this time that you got involved with holistic health?

GARNETTE: At that time I was more concerned with the *Course of Miracles.* The course teaches that there is only the existence of spirit and that nothing else exists. I did the course for two years and gained an enormous amount of insight. I learned that Jesus is a pure, loving, and compassionate person and that our Father in heaven loves us and will always love us. Most important it taught me that when I no longer feel His love, it is not that He has gone away, but that I have. On the one hand, it was extremely helpful to me, yet on the other it widened the gap between myself and the organized church.

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There had been moments when I had been involved with the church. However, I constantly sought to find fault with it. There was the time when the minister of the church, quoting from his own sermons, launched a fund-raising campaign. In the letter he stated that there were few in the congregation who expected to see Jesus Christ walk through the door. I don't know about anyone else, but I expected that. Why should I not expect it? It's a possibility. Moreover, I believed that anyone who came through the door of the chapel was the son or daughter of God. Statements like that encouraged me to alienate myself from the church.

FIP: Can you tell us more about the *Course of Miracles*?

GARNETTE: First of all, it is a course set with specific texts. There are three volumes in all, two of which are the readings and a workbook and the third is the teaching manual. Most of the texts are difficult to understand and sound as though they were translated into English directly from the Aramaic texts. The course is not for everyone. One of the things I learned from the course is that we have misconstrued most words, especially those associated with the spiritual life. For example, *sin*. We all know the meaning of sin, at least I thought I did. Since we have heard the word thousands upon thousands of times, we expect that we understand what is meant by the term. The course relies heavily upon understanding the specific meaning of the words, and a dictionary becomes a constant companion. In looking at the dictionary, one finds that sin means, "missing the mark." It does not imply hell, it does not impute guilt. It simply means that you are on the wrong path. It is rather comforting to come across the true meaning of a word, especially one like sin. Another thing that the course gave me was a perspective on the meaning of words and how very carelessly we use them. It also redefined the cause and effect of communication with others. How necessary it is to use the proper words if we wish to have the proper effect on people. People are so involved with themselves that they fail to see that they have developed their own methods of communication. People must break through their own barriers, if they are to learn to communicate with others. Is communication not the most important form of bringing people together? Without it, can people stay together? I don't think so. Look at families, for example. Families tend to fragment because the fabric tears through lack of communication. The generation gap is nothing more than a myth, there is no difference between the age of one person and another. There is just an inability to communicate. Communication is nothing more nor nothing less than finding the common thread. Anyway after the *Course of Miracles*, I became very involved with the holistic health movement.

FIP: How did this come about?

GARNETTE: When one begins to search, one is often amazed at what one finds. Actually, I seemed to have been guided into holistic health. There was a woman who came from California. She was a natural healer and she taught some of us who were actively involved in holistic health a method of laying-on of hands. I thought that I was ready for it because of the amount of time I

had spent in meditation. I had a lot of trouble with it. The concept was easy enough. It was a matter of being spiritually attuned to those about you and allowing the universal energy to flow through you into the person you wished to heal. I began laying my hands on anyone so that I could heal them. This is all very fine and noble as long as you do not have an ego problem.

Once, I remember going into a hospital, no sooner had I entered the building than my eye misted over. I thought that I had gone blind. What had actually happened was that I, despite myself, had begun to absorb all sorts of afflictions without knowing it. What actually happened in the hospital was that there was a lady who was going in for eye surgery, and I in all my innocence had taken on her infirmity. Now I am learning that healers have a way of releasing the universal energy without having to take on the infirmity.

FIP: While you were involved in holistic health, you also experienced the teachings of Shyam Bhatnagar. Can you tell us about him?

GARNETTE: After the initial experience with Joseph Campbell, I sought Shyam out. His teachings centered around inner tuning through yoga, and I knew so little about it, which frightened me in a way. My middle-class American traditions forbade me to relinquish control to another person. He happens to be a beautiful person and his teachings are right, but I wasn't ready. That was the cause of my problem with him.

Now we are arriving at my philosophy. I am a *mainstreamer*. I do not want to get involved with any subculture. I am convinced that I will stay close to the traditional church and still explore other faiths and philosophies. I must be able to stay in touch with my traditions, my background, and my standards. Yet at the same time feel free to explore. You see, I have found that the best and most efficacious method is through prayer and meditation. There happens to be a considerable difference between prayer and meditation. Prayer in the usual sense means asking for something. That is often the most difficult habit to break from. If one continues in the same vein, one eventually sees that the efforts are misguided. It is in meditation that we receive the greatest good. For in meditation we receive what we need and not what we want, and we realize that that is more important than anything else.

FIP: Is it possible that Princeton is actually an experimental testing-ground for different faiths?

GARNETTE: Wherever there is a spiritual thirst, someone will fill man's cup. It appears, at least for me, that that is the case. Joseph Campbell and Sam Keen came to the University Chapel. Shyam Bhatnagar lives in Princeton. I was introduced to the *Course of Miracles* here in Princeton. Finally, there is the power of prayer and meditation which I found here in Princeton. Even though I have had to find most of this outside of the traditional church, I have made what I consider to be a significant beginning. Princeton is actually no different than anywhere else. If man is on a spiritual quest, he will find whatever he needs in so far as he believes. It is the direction of the heart and not the geographic location that is important.

DAVID HEINLEIN: A NEW JERSEY WRITER FINDS "A Sense of Life"

FIP: David, where does your interest in Japanese culture stem from?

DAVID: My interest in Japan does not stem from one single vein of thought, but it comes from my background, the distillation of my parents' professions and my own interests and curiosity. Firstly, my parents had taught in Japan prior to World War II. The war forced them to go first to the Philippines and from there back to the United States. Although I was born and raised in New Jersey, their stay in the Far East imbued me with a sense of culture, for which I am very grateful. The influence of my parents' experience in Japan must have made a considerable impression on me, for when I was ready to go to college, I had decided to study Chinese. The Far East has always fascinated me. My studies in Chinese originate from my interest in the cultural revolution that was going on in China during the sixties. This, coupled with the ubiquitous art and conversation that flowed in the house and my own curiosity, led me to Oriental studies.

Like most seniors, I had to wrestle with the uncertainty of the future. Sometime during my final year at college I was told about a Japanese graduate of Amherst who had returned to Japan and started a school. The school was named Doshisha. Since that time a fellowship had been instituted that allowed the qualified recipient of the fellowship to travel to Japan, take up residence at the school, and teach English. No sooner had I heard of the fellowship than I knew that it was what I wanted. The prospect of participating in Japanese society enthralled me, my expectations grew and grew. I applied for the fellowship and began the inexorable wait. The fellowship was finally granted and I left for Japan.

FIP: What were your first impressions? Was there a sense of cultural shock?

DAVID: First of all, I did not speak the language very well. Secondly, I had arrived without resources, not financial ones but the cultural tools that permit us to survive and grow in an alien environment. Because of the extreme differences which exist between Eastern and Western cultures, I felt very alienated. One cannot begin to conceptualize the differences until one has actually set foot in Japan. The uniformity of the people — their physical stature, color of hair, complexion — is at first overwhelming. The spatial limitations to which one must adapt, the crowds of people, the way of sleeping, the absence of chairs, and the different diet. All of these things and more hit you very quickly. All of the changes that one must make are dramatic, immediate, and, in my case, lasting. This was all compounded by the fact that I had no friends at first. One is suddenly shocked by the reality of the situa-

tion, one's bearings are disoriented. One must reach deep within oneself if one is to go on in a healthy way.

FIP: In what way have the changes been lasting?

DAVID: In the beginning, the routine at the school was not that demanding. I had to teach classes of English in the mornings. I did fill more of the time with studying Japanese at a local language school, but I was soon to feel that this was not enough. I was also encouraged to do something with the extra time I had. So I joined an *aikido* club. Little did I realize that joining the club was to have profound effects on my life.

FIP: Is it possible that a form of martial art can have such an effect?

DAVID: In Japan, they understand the martial arts differently than we do in the West. *Aikido* differs from the rest of the martial arts. It is both a defensive system and a spiritual path, and as much emphasis is placed on spiritual growth as on physical development. The *dōjō*, which was the place where we practiced, was located in a temple. Each morning before we began the day's practice, we would line up in a row on our knees, clap, and bow to the picture of the founder of *aikido*, Ueshiba. I realize that we were recognizing a power greater than ourselves. We would then begin by running through the streets of Kyoto and return to the temple, which was named Chomyoji, meaning "mysterious summit."

Aikido is not only learning to use physical movement to one's advantage, but more importantly learning to control the emanation of universal force that generates from the body. The founder of *aikido*, Ueshiba, had great reverence for life and people. As a seeker of harmony, he sought ways to help man. He wanted to make man's struggle with life easier, to elevate man's condition towards spiritual progress, and by doing so make man more conscious of his union with the universe. The word *aikido* is composed of Chinese characters: the first means "union"; the second means "spirit"; the third means "path."

FIP: How do you tie all this with your contentment with life?

DAVID: Basically, the study of *aikido* provided a daily structure to my life. For example, in the United States we are conditioned by the presence of the automobile. While I was in Japan I did not have access to a car. Therefore, I had to reach out for other means of transportation. The significance is not in the means of travel, but that I had to learn to see differently, to experience and understand it. During my first year in Japan I had to live in a dormitory. This was different from anything that I had previously experienced although I had lived in American dorms. It was hot in summer and cold in winter. I learned to accept it, whereas to oppose it would have defeated the purpose of being in Japan. This entire change of perspective came to me through the

sense of discipline that *aikido* practice gave to me. Although there were many times I did not feel like going, I still went because you were expected to be there. Then came the time when I went because I wanted to be there. In retrospect, I see that I needed the discipline, not because my life was chaotic but because it lacked inner calm. The aim of *aikido* studies has been extremely beneficial for me. It has been nothing more nor nothing less than a self-revelation of mind and spirit.

FIP: Can you say that this Japanese experience has helped to focus your life?

DAVID: It most certainly has. It appears in many ways to have transformed my life, my attitudes, and my views. Ever since my first introduction to the Far East through my parents, it seems that the circle is closing and that my destiny has led me to where I am supposed to be.

I have completed a master's degree in Asian studies and have just started a doctoral program in bilingual education in Japanese-English. I realize that all of this was provoked by a sense of curiosity and interest coupled by a bad case of cultural shock. To overcome the cultural shock I had to change. More importantly, I had to have the desire to want to change. I truly wanted to understand another culture, and I set about doing this by getting to know other people and by being willing to accept them for what they were despite the fact that they were different from me. While in Japan, my values changed through the experience, exposure, and effort to understand that which was around me and within me.

FIP: How do you see all of this evolving for the future?

DAVID: The past ten years have been the most difficult in my life. I feel that my persistence in studying Japanese, and my continued practicing of *aikido* will enable me to pursue the goals that I have set for myself. Those goals consist of an area of study concerning Japanese-U.S. relations and bilingual education in particular. I hope to continue translating and I will most definitely continue my writing. The rest is really immaterial, for I know now that I am on the right path, that my life and my endeavors are directly correlated to the attitude that I have about myself. The changes that I have made are lasting, insofar as I continue to maintain the positive attitude that made those changes possible. My experience in Japan was invaluable to me because now I can see that it is not that the orientals are right and the occidentals are wrong, it is that they have attained a sense of life which appeals to me.

In this mass society where things have been converted to "mass culture," in spite of seeking intermingling with each other, people go to the left and go to the right, in the midst of estranged circumstances, without being able to establish solidarity. — from JAPAN: SIX TRANSLATIONS AND TWO DIARIES by David Heinlein. See following pages for additional samples.

David Heinlein is a 34-year-old writer and poet whose works have appeared with the Route 1 *workshop and the* Nichibei News *of New York.*

The Workings of a Dōjō

A DŌJŌ works only when people are in it. The dōjō makes the place; the people make the dōjō. Some dōjōs have no objects in them; others are filled with sticks, pictures, scrolls, and so on. A dōjō may be in a cornfield or on top of a mountain.

One dōjō was next to a parking lot. In it children played baseball and people fixed maple branches. A large tree or two grew next to it. And there were three steps leading up to it. A tap of water was on the side, and there people washed their feet when they came into the dōjō barefooted. This was standard procedure. On occasion when someone accidentally walked into the dōjō with his shoes on; others wiped off the dust after him.

The dōjō was made a long time ago. It was an appendage of a temple, which the monks let out. The master had a sign, "Aikido," on the outside, for this was an Aikido-Dōjō, and at times celebrated an "Embu" or display there, at which many people from nearby cities came, recordings were made, and so on.

But daily the dōjō was different. There were no flags, no drapes outside, only a flag of Japan inside, a picture of the founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba, and a *Kakemono* or scroll which said, "While throwing, study all ki."

First there was prayer. Then the practice began, with *taeno*

tenkan, a kind of swishing exercise to get the *ki* flowing. When the instructor deemed the *ki* sufficient, other *kata* were followed and developed over an hour. The group usually did not stay in the dojo for more than an hour, although there were exceptions.

Visiting Okinawa

IN the spring of 1971 I was in Okinawa for about ten days. I went to both the northern and southern parts of the island. This time, 1971, was just before Okinawa's reversion to Japan. Because I could understand Japanese a little, perhaps I was able to communicate with Okinawan people more than the average foreign traveler. I was also able to go on foot to places that most travelers don't get to.

One day I decided to go to the village of Itoman. The family of a friend of mine from Doshisha lived there, and visiting them was the reason for my trip. They did not know that I was coming to pay a call. The house was surrounded by a low stone fence. Of course the family was astounded that a foreign visitor had come by himself to such a small village. Everyone was happy that I had come to visit and treated me very kindly.

I was in Itoman for about twenty-four hours. The ocean was nearby. Americans call the region around that village "suicide cliffs," but I did not know the history of the locale well. That night while sleeping in the guest room, I was awakened by the wind and waves of the ocean making a strange sound. It sounded like the voices of many people wailing far off. That night I did not sleep well.

The next morning my friend's father took me down close by the ocean. Itoman was the site during the Second World War of fierce battles. By the ocean the Japanese government had constructed memorials of the war. Furthermore, there were spread out some stone markers from each prefecture of Japan commemorating those lost in battle. I gazed at these memorials from a distance. Then we went to the cliffs. I was led up to the entrances to some of the caves in the cliffs. Many young Japanese died in these caves. Because I was always practicing with the members of an Aikido club in Kyoto, I had an interest in the behavior of young Japanese. Furthermore, I felt very strange entering these caves, because I had met some American soldiers stationed in Okinawa. Many butterflies fluttered here and there in the area of the cliffs . . . . It seemed to me just possible that the souls of the dead were residing in these myriads of creatures.

JIM LARAMEE: A UNION LEADER DISCOVERS "The Heart's Importance"

FIP: We understand that you had a regular religious upbringing before you became acquainted with Meher Baba. Would you like to tell us about it?

JIM: Well, I was born and baptized a Roman Catholic and followed the parochial school system through high school. As a young boy I can remember having the greatest faith, I literally believed everything that I was taught. I particularly loved the stories of the saints because they had this sustaining faith. However, by the time I reached the eighth grade I had serious doubts about Catholicism. I was particularly concerned by the fact that certain sins could condemn me to eternal damnation. It appeared to be pretty stiff punishment for a human being.

FIP: At this age did you have any idea that there might be another way?

JIM: Yes. When I was in high school I was exposed to my first agnostic as well as to various faiths. I began to take an interest in comparative religions. More so than in philosophy, which I have always felt was like a dog chasing its tail. The only thing that happens is that you get tired. I had arrived at the point where I was asking myself very deep questions about where we came from and where we were going, and what you should do with your life. Even though I was socially active and involved in many things, I went through periods of intense moral conflict.

FIP: Did you make any decisions to change the course of your life?

JIM: Yes. I then attended a military academy in Connecticut, and it was there that I encountered my first Baptist group. I was attracted to them because they appeared very much alive, very much involved. I made the decision to accept Christ as a personal savior then. The decision was sincere. However, I ended up having problems with my choice. I realized that I did not feel satisfied. I felt empty, unsatisfied and unrewarded.

FIP: What did you do then?

JIM: One of the reasons that I left the military academy was that I could not marry while I was there. I had met this girl before I left for the academy. She was sixteen, and I was eighteen. During the course of the one summer that I was away, she decided to marry a very close friend of mine. That decision, coupled with my barren spiritual life, tore me apart. I was no longer content. I had to have some answers. I would occasionally go to their home for dinner. One night there came the sudden realization that I could not be that close to her and not be with her. I stopped over one morning and mentioned to her that I had decided to leave the state immediately. Knowing what my feelings were for her, I asked her to come with me. We left a few days later and went

to Colorado, where I had two brothers living and working in construction. While I was out there, I read books like Huxley's *Doors of Perception*, which deals with the expansion of consciousness by chemical means. This was to lead to my initial involvement with drugs, their properties, and the ways with which to expand the consciousness and make an attempt to understand the universe. Within myself there was a deep desire to understand the nature of man and his relation to the universe. In my different readings, I had come across the ascetics who prepared themselves for the release of inner consciousness through self-discipline. I didn't understand the reason for the self-discipline and that taking the drugs would be enough. I was wrong — and, after a few bad experiences, I gave up — temporarily, anyway, seeking mind-expansion through chemicals.

FIP: If drugs did not provide you with an answer, did any of the readings?

JIM: Yes and no. It is a difficult question to answer. I was reading a great deal at this time. I began to collect books. I particularly enjoyed reading the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads. The Buddhist and Hindu tracts were to provide me with an entirely different understanding of life. I began to conceptualize the difference between the Christian and Eastern faiths. The Christians believed that all must be accomplished within a single life span. The Eastern philosophies provided a person with many life spans so as to evolve spiritually. The Easterners allowed for slow learners. I felt that so long as I had enough time I could eventually arrive at a conscious realization of our unity with God. Even though I was interested, I could not share this with anyone. There was one other couple who took me to their temple and I chanted and prayed with them. However, being newly initiated to this, I needed someone to help sustain this interest. The interest waned and then subsided altogether. Also there was something else which occurred in my life.

FIP: What was that?

JIM: During our stay in Colorado my wife secured her divorce and we were married. However, in November 1973, my wife was taken to the hospital and an ovarian cancer was discovered. They performed a total hysterectomy the day after her twenty-first birthday. This was very difficult for my wife to accept. She was young and now barren. The following months were followed by cobalt radiation treatments and a series of operations were necessary.

FIP: This must have been an extremely difficult adjustment for the both of you, spiritually and emotionally.

JIM: It certainly was. We had a very difficult time. My wife's illness lasted about five years. In the course of this period of time, Colorado went through a recession and I could not find any work. Out of desperation and because we had nowhere else to go, we returned to New Jersey. My parents had managed

to forgive the way in which we were married. I imagine that it was difficult for them because they were very strict Catholics. We stayed with them until we got our own apartment. I eventually got a job at a factory, my wife was feeling better, and it appeared that things were finally straightening themselves out.

Then one day I received a telephone call at work telling me that my wife had been taken to the hospital. At the hospital they told me that my wife required an immediate operation because of a strangulated bowel. I was reluctant to give permission until the doctor convinced me that it was essential in saving my wife's life.

FIP: How was her recovery?

JIM: It was very long and arduous. I must admit that there were moments that I did not think that I would be able to continue. It was terrible for her and very difficult for me. I was twenty-five years old at the time and I saw my wife as a burden. I had become emotionally weakened by the ordeal of her recovery. Spiritually I was aimless, without direction or place to turn to, and financially we could barely keep our heads above water. This is difficult to admit to but there were moments of rage against my wife. Once when she was so incapacitated by the pain and moaning on the couch that I offered to kill her and by doing so I would relieve her of her pain permanently.

Around this time I began to have a series of affairs that seriously complicated my life. I desperately needed someone to lean on, to consider as a companion. This did not help matters at all, it simply made me guilty. I also returned to using drugs and alcohol with greater frequency. I can now see that I was trying to modify reality. The alcohol had very adverse effects on me and I was becoming more and more guilty about being unfaithful to my wife. The more problems which occurred with my wife's recovery, the more I tended to involve myself with other women. The fabric of my life was disintegrating not only due to the drugs and alcohol but because of a conflict of interest. My feelings were so strained by the emotional stress I decided to consult with a doctor. He prescribed Valium, a mild tranquilizer, which I used with alcohol. I was going downhill and I could not see it happening. There were other things happening in my life which hid the truth of my own condition from me.

I had been doing very well at work and had become involved with the labor union and in October of 1976 I was elected president of the union. Because my personal life was in such a shambles, I used the job at the union as a vehicle of involvement with other people so that I would not have to think about my own problems. In some ways I was fortunate to have this position because it allowed me to vent all of the anger that was stored up inside me. This anger generated great amounts of energy that I channeled into helping others.

I had not forgotten my readings and I turned to them for inspiration. I remember that I read the Bible constantly, seeking answers and guidance

from God. But the answers that I wanted never came. There was one passage in the New Testament that I remember reading over and over again. It is where Jesus says, "All the things I have done and more, you shall be able to do." I was not able to see that I was doing all that I could for my wife and that I needed to turn over the problem to God. My wife was not getting any better and I continued to feel abandoned by God.

We were informed of a chiropractor who might be able to do something for my wife. We went to the chiropractor. As I walked into his office, my eyes fell on a plaque which bore a photograph of Meher Baba. The first thing that attracts your attention when you see him is the incredible serenity that emanates from his face. There are these penetrating eyes that rivet your gaze and a smile that is so warm that you cannot help but feel a certain peace. On the bottom of the plaque was written, "Don't worry, be happy." After seeing that picture for the first time I experienced a sense of relief. This was not the first time that I had been introduced to Indian avatars and their prescriptions for happiness. I was extremely sceptical of their ability to do anything for my wife or me. Even though I had been through hell, felt emotionally drained, spiritually bankrupt, I was, until this point unwilling to surrender to the fact that I could find help elsewhere rather than from within myself. I was now prepared to accept the fact that I was defeated.

The chiropractorsaid that people became interested in the teachings of Meher Baba through attraction not promotion. Even though he told me little else, I managed to secure an address where I could obtain books. I ordered a number of books, pamphlets, and pictures and began to digest the teachings of this twentieth-century Christ.

I returned to the teachings of Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus and used them as comparisons to Meher Baba. At this point, I came across a book on comparative religions entitled *The Religions of Man,* by Houston Smith. It was an inspiring book that spoke of looking at the religions of the world with love and taking the best from each of them. I used this book in evaluating Meher Baba against other Christ-like figures in history. This was not a simple task because Meher Baba was not a simple person. His philosophy of life is simple and straightforward but one has to achieve an understanding of his teachings through his writings, and simple clear writing was by no means his greatest achievement. He observed silence for forty-four years, from 1925 to the end of his life in 1969. The works of foremost importance to me are his *Discourses* which he dictated to his disciples by pointing to a board with letters on it. This is how he communicated for years until he gave up the board and communicated strictly through gestures. Only his closest disciples could interpret these gestures. My curiosity had been stimulated by this character and I wanted to find out more about him.

FIP: Is there a Meher Baba center somewhere in the United States?

JIM: Yes, there is one. It is a meditation retreat center in Myrtle Beach,

South Carolina. There was a union convention going on in Florida, and on our way back we stopped at the center. It is beautifully located on prime land, a very serene place. We had intentions of spending the night there. One of the questions they asked me was whether I had any recent experiences with drugs. I said I had and they mentioned that a person had to be drug-free for at least ninety days before they would let you stay. Despite the fact that we could not stay, they were very nice to us and gave us a tour of the grounds. The fact that I could not stay there really affected me. It pierced through the illusion that drug-taking was all right. I could no longer hide behind the intellectual justifications of taking drugs. They stated it very simply.

This experience shook me. The fact that I was unfit to spend the night at a retreat because I had used drugs caused me to want to stop. This occurrence was to lead to my entrance into an alcohol and drug rehabilitation center. I wanted to go back to Myrtle Beach because they had something there that I wanted. But it was not easy. To be drug-free, I was literally counting the days when I could get high for the last time and still be able to have the ninety days so that I could spend some time at the meditation center.

To say that this was something meaningful to me is an understatement. Meher Baba's photographs radiate power and strength. There seems to be some spiritual emanation from his photographs which inspires me. There was also something else about Meher Baba which I had never encountered with any of the modern-day teachers. Meher Baba actually stated that he was the Christ. It sounds outrageous, but not if you understand what he was all about. He knew that he was God and that this was the way it was supposed to be. He was the advent of grace which would help to lift mankind out of ignorance and selfishness and raise humanity to levels of spiritual life. I wanted in many ways to disbelieve but I could not.

Meher Baba stated his way simply and unpretentiously. This is a statement of fact, which in my mind is true humility. Because he had made it known that this was his claim, he had to be held accountable. This is the sort of statement which demands total belief. Meher Baba never coerced anyone into belief. You either believed or did not believe. Either way was all right.

But the important thing was what I felt in my heart, because that is where all important answers come from. Meher Baba's statement that he was God is of such magnitude and yet so vastly simple that it defies the human intellect. The understanding must come from the heart. So I looked to my heart and came to know he spoke the truth. With that answer I came to embrace Meher Baba.

FIP: How have Meher Baba's teachings influenced your life?

JIM: To understand his teachings I had to understand the man. I had to see what kind of example he had set while he was alive. I set about doing this with a total acceptance that no matter what I was going to come across in his teachings I would be willing to consider them openmindedly. First of all, his sayings are very illuminating to me. In previous readings I could often only

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Sayings from Meher Baba

Meher Baba (1894-1969) observed a vow of silence that lasted forty-four years, traveled throughout Europe and America, and wrote Discourses by Meher Baba *and* God Speaks. *These books and others can be obtained from the Meher Center On The Lakes, P.O. Box 487, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29577.*

Twelve Ways Of Realizing Me

1. Longing: If you have the same longing and thirst for union with me as one who longs for water, then you will realize me.
2. Peace of mind: If you have the peace of a frozen lake, then you will realize me.
3. Humility: If you can be moulded into any shape, then you will know me.
4. Desperation: If you cannot live without seeing me, then you will see me.
5. Faith: If you can believe that it is night although it is day, then you will know me.
6. Fidelity: If you have the fidelity that the breath has in giving you company, even without your constantly feeling it, till the end of your life, then you will know me.
7. Control through love: When your love for me drives away your lust for the things of the senses, then you realize me.
8. Selfless service: If you have the quality of selfless service unaffected by results, similar to that of the sun which serves the world by shining on all creation, then you will win me.
9. Renunciation: If you renounce for me everything physical, mental and spiritual, then you have me.
10. Obedience: If your obedience is spontaneous, complete and natural, then you come to me.
11. Surrenderance: If your surrenderance to me is as wholehearted as that of one who, suffering from insomnia, surrenders to sudden sleep without fear of being lost, then you have me.
12. Love: If you have that love for me which St Francis had for Jesus, then not only will you realize me but you will please me.

MEHER BABA

Compassionate Father

believe about ten percent of what they said. With Meher Baba, more than ninety percent of what he says really makes sense. The remainder I cannot understand what he means, perhaps one day I shall understand all he says. It was a great experience for me to begin to understand someone else and trust in Meher Baba. But it was not only the sayings that proved important, it was also the example he set. He spent a great amount of time working with all kinds of people. He would work with lepers and with the poor. He would have a thousand people come to Meherabad in India and he would wash their feet. He would give them small amounts of money, a little food, and clothing and send them on their way, thus blessing the poor everywhere. I came across many others who performed similar acts of charity. Baba said that he was not only working with the individuals in his presence but he was working with the poor all over the world. When he would care for a leper, he said that he was not only caring for that leper but for all the lepers in the world.

The more I studied Meher Baba, the more enthralled I became. I came to realize that he did not come to establish a new religion but to put life into the existing ones. I believe that my eyes were opened when I embraced Meher Baba. In the other faiths I did not see people practicing what they preached. I did not feel that their answers concerning where we are going, why we are here, and where we come from were complete. Meher Baba answered these questions and many more for me. One very important question that Baba answered for me was about God. He said when God asked the question "Who am I?" the whole of creation was the result. God perceived the creation rather than Himself as the infinite, boundless, eternal divinity. Meher Baba also answered the question of reincarnation. He explained why some people are born retarded and why people spend their entire lives starving to death. He explained why there are villainous and selfish people and why they seem to flourish. He gave answers to the paradoxes which puzzled me. He explained all this in very simple terms. He said that man will experience joy or suffering in the immediate afterlife based on what he had done during his lifetime. By being born again we reap what we have sown.

Meher Baba would say that one of the most spiritual things you can do is to smile at someone or give them a helping hand. He constantly emphasized the eradication of the ego. As the ego diminishes, then an individual grows spiritually. He advocated selfless service as a means of achieving spiritual growth. He also believed in allowing everybody to believe what they wanted to believe.

Meher Baba went around the world contacting persons who were spiritually evolved. He never told them that they had to change their ways, only to love God and man. One can draw an analogy between the faiths existing in the world and the paths going up a mountain. The closer one gets to the top, the closer the paths come together. In essence, all religions are one.

FIP: Have you spoken to others about Meher Baba?

JIM: My life has changed entirely because of Meher Baba. I have spoken to

those who are close to me about him. But because of the profound influence it is often difficult to match the words to the thoughts. Part of the reason why I hesitate to speak about him is that Baba would always say that you had to be able to live his teachings before you could speak about them. That more than anything else appealed to me. I had become tired of those who spoke strongly about faith but failed in living what they spoke about. Meher Baba spoke of things that I could understand and apply in my daily living. He would say that God is everywhere and that despite all one's weaknesses, one should concentrate on being a better person by being a source of purity, truth, and love.

FIP: What do you do on a daily basis to maintain your spirituality?

JIM: Meher Baba said that all one has to do to stay happy is to think of him, love people, lose yourself in the service of others, and repeat his name constantly. On a daily basis, I have disciplined myself to read one chapter of his *Discourses.* The *Discourses* are various thoughts directed towards dealing with problems of daily life. They provide insights on how to get out of oneself. They form the easiest of his works for me to understand. He produced a book called *God Speaks.* It is a vast book written in great detail and often overwhelming intellectually. Possibly, the reason he did this was to prove the point that one does not achieve an understanding of God through the intellect. It is through the heart that one comes to understand God.

FIP: What happened to Meher Baba?

JIM: He passed his body on January 31, 1969. Meher Baba said that when he broke his silence, so great would be the spiritual energy released that all living things would feel it. It would mark the advent of a new humanity. He felt that people would be spiritually attuned. That the world would work in cooperation instead of competition. Generosity and love would flourish until his return, which would happen in seven hundred years. Mankind would then be at its spiritual zenith. It is not necessary to deliberate whether this has come to pass. The importance lies in loving Meher Baba. He was simplistic by nature, but this was coupled by an enigmatic and supreme sense of humor.

FIP: As a final question, can you sum up the happiness that you have experienced by following Meher Baba?

JIM: That is difficult to do because of the fact that nothing worthwhile has happened in my life without the presence of Meher Baba. He came into my life to awaken those things that are already within me. That was very important to me because he did not tell me that I had to believe, but to love and serve others. Today I have that one faith that satisfies me. Each individual has to find his or her own path. When they find that one, then they will begin the greatest journey of all.

MEHER BABA:

Self-Knowledge

WHEN the time is ripe, the advancement of a person towards self-knowledge comes about as naturally as the physical body of the child grows into full-fledged form. The growth of the physical body is worked out by the operation of natural laws, and the progress of the aspirant towards self-knowledge is worked out by the operation of spiritual laws pertaining to the transformation and emancipation of consciousness. The physical body of the child grows very gradually and almost imperceptibly, and the same is true of the spiritual progress of the person who has once entered the Path. The child does not know how its physical body grows; in the same way the aspirant also is oblivious of the law by which he makes headway towards the destination of his spiritual progress. The aspirant is generally conscious of the manner in which he has been responding to the diverse situations in life, and rarely conscious of the manner in which he makes progress towards self-knowledge.

Without consciously knowing it, the aspirant is gradually arriving at self-knowledge by traversing the Inner Path through his joys and sorrow, his happiness and suffering, his success and failures, his efforts and rest, and through his moments of clear perception and harmonized will as well as through the moments of confusion and conflict.

These are the manifestations of his unconscious which he has brought from the past, and the aspirant forges his way towards self-knowledge through the tangles of the unconscious like the traveler threading his way through a wild and thick forest.

It is only in spiritual freedom that one can have *abiding happiness and unimpaired self-knowledge.* It is only in spiritual freedom that there arises the supreme certainty of Truth. It is only in spiritual freedom that there is the final ending of sorrow and limitation. It is only in spiritual freedom that one can live for all, and yet be detached in the midst of all activities. Any lesser type of freedom is comparable to a house which is built on sand, and any lesser type of attainment is fraught with the fear of decay. Therefore there is no gift greater than the gift of spiritual freedom, and there is no task more important than the task of helping others to achieve spiritual

"Holy Alcohol" *(continued from page 45)*

about one to two in the afternoon — we lived on a river that fed right into Long Island Sound — and I remember lying on that bed and willing myself to die. I wanted to die. And again I had this sense of inversion, like an inverted whirlpool boring into me somewhere in the region of my chest or heart. But instead of going into an ecstatic experience, it was as if something cracked in me. I could literally hear a noise like a snap of the fingers, and a little voice popped out — it sounded like Jimminy Cricket in Walt Disney's *Pinocchio.*

It was a little high voice. I realized the significance of that. A still small voice. Is it Ezekiel? It was sweet and solitary and still and separate from me. And it kept laughing at me and saying, "What are you worrying about? You fool! Everything is going to be all right." It was later described to me by a psychiatrist as obvious schizophrenia.

The voice kept telling me all sorts of things from the depths of my unconscious. And I kept testing it. "Tell me when so-and-so painted such-and such a painting," I'd say. And I'll be damned if it didn't come out with the correct date.

Finally I said, "Look, how long are you going to stay with me?" As I said it, I had this sense of exhilaration. I was very happy.

"Well," it said, "I'll stay with you today, but then I'm going to leave you and I'm going to leave forever."

And I had this terrible sense of fear.

I walked down to the beach and the voice and I conversed and finally, at nine or ten that night, I was exhausted and said, "Look. I've got to go home. When is it going to happen?"

"You're going to have seven lean years," it said, "and then you're going to have seven fat years, and from then on in it's going to be perfect." That was in 1962.

Then I separated from my first wife and went to a hotel and one night on or close to my fortieth birthday I was unable to sleep. I went down to a bar and did something I had never done before — I drank to get drunk, and I did. I took a bottle to bed with me, and I was off and running. The next six years were total hell.

I don't want to go into it, but I married a woman I had known for years and didn't like or trust. She had been in and out of sanitariums. I thought I was marrying her to save her. I realize now that she was probably the only woman in the world who would have me. I was a raving maniac in terms of alcohol and was clinging to anything, any human life. I had a total personality change. I broke her nose a couple of times. The police were called often. I had innumerable blackouts.

FIP: You were getting very close to — as they say in AA — "hitting bottom."

GEORGE: Yes. I had moved into the spiritual part of my disease. I am totally convinced that Jung was right when he drew the correlation between spiritual disease and the alcoholic's need for spirits. This is what I mean by "holy alcohol."

It was as if all the spiritual aspirations that had marked my life were coming to a head. It was an all-or-nothing game. Assuming that I was to be rescued and saved, if you will, it was something I had to do because I had to destroy that sense of self-righteousness — that sense of being a winner because somehow I could talk a good game of God.

Let me add a bit more about alcohol. We get the name "firewater" from the American Indian. The Indians — who, as far as we know, had no knowledge of fermented liquor — came to it with a fresh tongue or palate and immediately made this connection of fire and water. What does fire and water mean? Jacob Boehme said the origin of all things is in fire and water. What does water represent? Water represents the moist, the passive, the feminine. It stands for love and for the priestly class — the fact that in all Western traditions, priests dress as women. Fire represents just the opposite — the active principle, the male. It's also dry and very aggressive. It represents knowledge. Where did these two things come together? In wine.

There's no need to go into the symbolism of wine in almost all traditions. Even in Islam, they may postpone the joys of wine to the afterlife, but it's certainly there. At any rate, my observation not only of myself but of most alcoholics is that, temperamentally, they seem to make these mercurial swings all the time. When they're moist, they long to be dry. This is known as a hangover. As soon as they're dry, they long to be moist. And they — we — can never strike the proper balance.

I suspect there's another aspect of fire and water. I mean, this business of how easy it is for alcoholics to cry. I suspect that one of the holy aspects of firewater is that it melts the hard heart. I'd like to tie all these notions together — the melting and the burning. The tradition of alchemy would, I suspect, be very enlightening and illuminating as to what happens to alcoholics. It literally brings us to tears and causes us to cry out for help.

FIP: You are not referring to American Indians by accident?

GEORGE: No, by this time, when my drinking was around the clock, I tried a geographical change. I sold our business in New York and moved out to Santa Fe and began raising horses, about which I knew nothing.

I tried suicide three times. Twice with pills. Once I slashed my wrists and was given five minutes to live. I was literally saved by a neighbor's wife who happened to stop by when I was bleeding to death in the bathtub. They gave me seven transfusions and I spent twenty-eight days in the hospital. I was divorced from my second wife.

I went back and began to drink again. I had no idea it was my problem. It got so far out of hand I became a total recluse. My mother, who was living

in Miami, got wind of this. I tried to lead her to believe I'd had a heart attack, but she found out that I'd tried suicide and — the night of my third attempt, when I swallowed pills — she woke up from a dream. She had a premonition that I needed her. She got some friends to drive her to the airport — she was in her late seventies at the time and dying — and flew out to Santa Fe and made me promise to leave the ranch and go to Florida.

I put my house on the block and took the long way round to Florida through Mexico. How I got through, I don't know. Bismarck has a saying that God looks after fools, drunks, and the United States of America, and I believe that because I ended up in native villages, with the money I had tied around me in a money belt, absolutely stoned out of my mind, and nobody bothered me. Everybody was very kind. I ended up in Miami.

I was forty-six years old. I was — except for an income which did not interest me just so long as I had enough to drink — completely bankrupt. Morally and certainly spiritually. I had no ties to anyone.

Again I was face to face with the *thing* itself. Because I could no longer blame anybody.

So, in May of 1969, I ended up in this furnished room in Miami just drinking. I had begun drinking in order to sleep, now of course, the devil who is alcohol was exacting his payment, and rather than sleep I couldn't sleep. I was staying awake and beginning to hallucinate.

At ten o'clock on the night of the first of June in 1969 I had to get out of that room. The walls were beginning to cave in. So I took my blanket and bottle down to the beach. It was a beautiful, moonlit night, and I sat on the beach and for the first time in years I prayed to God for help. In the depths of this terrible alcoholism I had lost faith in the power of God to help me but never in God's existence. I used to throw bottles and glasses against the wall and put my fists through it and say, "Where the hell are you?" and a lot worse things. He never came. Because what was necessary for me was to literally surrender — to get down on my hands and knees and beg for help because my pride and stupidity had been horrendous.

On the beach that night I looked out at the water and realized I was going to swim out. I knew I was at the end of something. I couldn't bear my existence for one more minute. I felt a sense of finality. Whatever it was, was finished. My interpretation was that I was going to swim toward the coast of Spain and that that would be it. Suddenly I felt cold. I forgot my resolution to swim out and went back and had what turned out to be my last five, six, or seven drinks and was knocked out.

I woke up, and it was nine in the morning — exactly nine, whatever significance that has. I had failed to pull down the blinds and the sun was on me. I hadn't bathed or shaved or eaten for days. I sat up in bed, and an incident came to mind that had happened twenty-three years before.

Back in 1946, I had just been discharged from the army. I was walking down Fifth Avenue in New York and someone stopped me. It was a fellow I didn't recognize. I'd worked with him for a brief time five years before, I hadn't known him well or particularly liked him. But the man was cheerful, well dressed, smiling, and appeared to have lost a great deal of weight. He in-

vited me into Schrafft's for a cup of coffee and for as long as it takes to have an extended cup of coffee he told me this story about how he had tried to get into the army and been rejected for some health problem. As a result, he had begun to drink and discovered he was an alcoholic, had joined something called "AA", which I'd never heard of, and it had completely changed his life. He was about to move out to the Coast and get married.

When I thought of him that morning in Miami, I hadn't thought of this fellow for the twenty-three years since. I sat up in bed and said, "My God! I'm an alcoholic!" I went to the phone book and called AA and they offered to come over. Stupidly I said, "No, I'll be okay." And they told me where the meeting was that night and I said I'd be there.

I almost immediately called my mother. Now, I was forty-six years old and like a child, and I understood the significance of if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven, you have to be as a child. I was beginning to give up childish things and becoming to some degree child-like — and I take no credit for that, because all the credit really went to alcohol. It was an initiation by the terrible experiences of being an alcoholic. I had never been able to be disciplined by this world or by my parents. I had always been a problem.

I went to my mother and started to cry and said, "Ma, I'm an alcoholic!"

Now, this was a reasonably unsophisticated woman. Although she had seen me in action at my ranch and in Florida, she had no idea I was an alcoholic. Rather than being shocked, she thought maybe I drank a bit too much. Now she said, "Thank God we found out what was causing it." It was all so simple. I was afraid to leave her all day. She made the couch up for me and had to change the sheets five or six times because the sweat was pouring out of me. I know now I probably should have gone to a rehab, but I didn't know about such things.

They had told me the AA meeting started at seven but I should be there by six. I insisted my mother go with me. I was afraid to go by myself. So we went, and there, sure enough, was some guy who was waiting and this was the first person I ever met in AA. I started to ask him a few questions. I thought AA was a place where they taught you how to control your drinking. Obviously he disabused me of that in short order. He set me down in a corner and in about three or four minutes he told me his story — that he had been a hairdresser, of all things, and spent ten or twelve years in the Massachusetts State Penitentiary for knifing a guy in a bar during a blackout. He'd missed the fellow's heart by an inch and so was in for only two years. And in the penitentiary he had learned about AA and had gotten out and been sober ever since.

I don't think he told me much more than that. And while he was telling it, I could feel this sense of relief. As I put this into perspective now, I realize I had passed from the kingdom of the virtuous into that of the sinners. I finally recognized, my God, that I was one of the sinners, I was one of all the guys I was with — all these potential murderers — after all, we're all murderers — and I was a murderer. I had tried self-murder three times. God knows how

often I tried murder in speech. My destiny was here in AA. I sensed this sense of forgiveness. Already, without my knowing it, the process of AA was beginning to work. This guy who was talking to me was forgiving me. And in the process I was going to learn to forgive myself. It would take time. And then I would be learning how to forgive others.

All this I owed to alcohol.

The tears started to flow. Those easy alcoholic tears. Admittedly, they're crocodile tears. But they're like alcoholism itself — the reflection of the truth. There's something there that really wants to cry out and can't.

And I was shaking and I couldn't hold a cigarette and the sweat was still pouring out of me. Then the meeting began. There were eight or ten or twelve people sitting around a room. They were discussing what they called the First Step. I almost started to laugh. Boozey and gauzy, I said to myself, "My God! I had to go to India to end up in a semi-sleazy church basement in Miami with a bunch of drunks to find out what the hell it was all about!"

From then on I can honestly say it was all clear sailing. I was one of those very fortunate people. Early on I began fantasizing this notion that, yes, I'll stay sober for my whole life but on my deathbed, I'll call for a bottle of champagne. Then I realized how self-defeating it was to be wishing myself dead every night, and stopped it.

I totally immersed myself in AA. Of course, having no home life or job, I could afford to commit myself to it day and night. Besides, I was in a big city where there were clubhouses and halfway houses and meetings day and night. Sometimes I went three or four times a day. I picked everybody's brains. I had to have it all — which, again, is the alcoholic personality.

I realized that, as an alcoholic, all my instincts had been right. Everything from that first ecstasy on — the instinct for the church, for the meditative business, for going to India. I was just looking for the right thing in the wrong place. The sense of exhilaration that alcohol gave me is precisely the thing I feel right now as I'm talking. And being privileged to spread the word. I think the most beautiful line in the English language is the line of John Milton where he talks about the "sober certainty of waking bliss." Which is what all alcoholics are looking for. And which is available to them in the AA program. It is available for those who seek, and those who seek shall find.

My heroic period was now over. And this was marvelous. I had earned the right to be just an ordinary person. And to learn what every eight-year-old learns — that, for instance, when something happens that you can't control, you accept it. This was a great revelation and enlightenment for me.

I had forgotten there were three possible answers to prayer — that *yes* isn't the only one that's possible — that there's *yes* and *no* and *maybe.*

The high I get in AA is enough for me. As I worked back trying to find out why I'd become an alcoholic, I realize I was ruled by self-will. Martin Luther said, "Hell is nothing but self-will." It came down really to what I'd been looking for all my life — to the wonderful Quaker saying: "Love is the answer. What is the question?"

The opinions expressed in this issue are the subjects and not necessarily those of the editors or of Fellowship in Prayer.

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